

An open book with glasses on a wooden surface against a blurred background. The book is open to a page with text, and a pair of glasses is resting on the right page. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light gray.

**EZEKIEL
DEVOTIONAL**

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

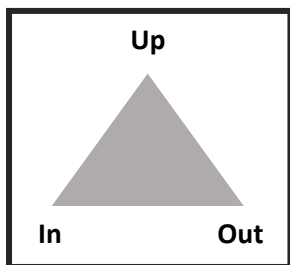
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL

Ezekiel was born into a priestly family and lived in Jerusalem until the year 597BC. This was the year King Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah a second time and carried much of the nobility, including Ezekiel, to Babylon.

Ezekiel received the first of a series of fourteen visions in 593BC, seven years before Jerusalem would be completely destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. His ministry was aimed at the Jewish exile community both before and after the fall of Jerusalem. All forty-eight chapters of his book are arranged chronologically and his visions are all dated.

Even the disasters of the decades during Ezekiel's ministry had a purpose in God's plan. Those events would somehow conspire to declare to the people that God was indeed the Lord. And so, the final impression that is left after reading this extraordinary book is one of hope. And we all know that God's hope does not disappoint.

So, you know the drill by now. Find a spot, get a brew, Bible, journal, and a sharp pencil, and off we go. You will love this!!!

Love you all,

Phil

Read

Ezekiel 1

Live

This is one of those chapters that the more you read it the more fascinating it becomes. It is like opening a pirate's treasure chest magnified a million times. Ezekiel was one of the most fascinating and mystical prophets of the Old Testament. He used symbols and allegory more than any other prophet. He had a vision of God's throne in this first chapter that I find stunning. This vision is highly detailed and is referenced throughout the book. There are storms with flashes of lightning, fire, living beings with four faces and four wings, wheels inside wheels pointing in every direction with rims full of eyes. My word, such an incredible vision!

Ezekiel's detailed description of the glory of God takes up nearly the whole chapter from verse 4 through to the end. In my head I am asking, 'Why all the detail from Ezekiel?' He is just reporting what he saw, down to the finest detail. Theologians have tried to dissemble this vision, breaking it down into components to make sense of each part. But let's face it, the manifestation of the glory of God is beyond comprehension, which is why Ezekiel's response was to fall on his face before God.

What amazing glory! What an amazing God! The psalmist reminds us that the heavens declare His glory and the earth unites in worship to His name, but there should be no greater proclamation of God's grace and glory, no worthier declaration of His wonder and praise than the worship that falls from the lips of sinners saved by grace. He has redeemed us by the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, and clothed us in His own garments of righteousness. He deserves our ceaseless praise and glory throughout time and into the eternal ages to come. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power be unto our God forever and ever.

Pray

Father, what matchless glory is Yours. As I look into the sky on a clear night and see the billions of stars placed there by You, even calling them each by name, it surely does display Your handiwork. I love how You love me, redeem, and restore me, calling me to Yourself. What a good, good Father You are. In Jesus' strong and holy name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

After such a powerful vision one can only expect Ezekiel to be called to deliver on it. God called Ezekiel to the prophetic ministry and basically told him, 'I'll give you the words, and you give them to the rebellious people of Israel.' Keep in mind that Ezekiel's audience is living in Babylon and he is prophesying to these exiles about their rebellion and the resulting judgment.

Verse 1 is the first time in his prophecy that Ezekiel refers to himself as the *"son of man"*. This little title will continue throughout the book, appearing some ninety-three times. It is interesting that this particular title was used by Jesus in the Gospels, and the Jewish leaders cracked up about it. Jesus frequently referred to Himself as the *"Son of man"* in His earthly ministry; actually, the term is used eighty-four times in the Gospels. The Jewish leaders wanted to charge and convict Jesus on grounds of blasphemy, but since Ezekiel had consistently referred to himself as the *"son of man"*, it was impossible for them to say that Jesus was claiming anything more than being a prophet, just like Ezekiel. We know, of course, that Jesus was in fact very God in the flesh, the One whom we thank daily for His generous hand and abundant provision which He lavishes on us day by day.

Our God is a good and mighty God whose great compassion and tender mercies are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness to us at all times. We can praise Him, saying, *"I worship You; I glorify You; I give thanks to You for Your great glory. I lift up my hands in worship and praise before You, for You alone are worthy of my reverential fear and humble praise. Father, not only do I praise and thank You for faithfully providing my daily needs, but for the amazing gift of salvation which You have given freely to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ – by Your grace through faith."*

Pray

Father, may I never cease to worship You in thought and in deed, and may my life never cease to be in awe and wonder, knowing that the eternal Creator and almighty God of the universe should die to save a sinner such as me. Praise Your holy name, forever and ever. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Ezekiel had just experienced an awesome call to the prophetic ministry, topped off by eating the scroll containing the prophetic words he was to utter. What do you even say after you've talked with God and seen His glory? Ezekiel had his mission from God but he was speechless. He went to the exiles but just sat with them without speaking for seven days. Would they receive the word? Here's the answer in verse 7, *"But the people of Israel are not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to Me, for all the Israelites are hardened and obstinate."* God gives Ezekiel a pretty strong commission here. He basically tells him to do a good job speaking God's word to His people. Doing so fulfils his responsibility whether they heed his word or not. However, if he does not prophesy to them as commanded by God, their blood is on his hands. This reminds me of our mandate to preach the gospel. It's not our job to save, but to proclaim the glorious kingdom of God!

We live in an angry world of increasingly angry people, where lives are filled with change and transition. We seem to be moving into a dangerous society that does not resemble the world we once knew. More and more these days I feel we need to cling ever more closely to God, knowing that He is a God who never changes towards us. We need a fresh revelation of the Holy Spirit to fix our hearts and minds on His eternal and unchanging truth and to wash ourselves daily in the cleansing flood of the water of the Word. We need to protect ourselves from those who would seek to undermine our trust in Him, and patiently endure the hardships that we may be called to face. My prayer is that we all develop in ourselves a true attitude of praise and worship no matter what the circumstances. We desperately need to build ourselves up in our faith, looking for the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Pray

Father, no matter what difficulties and dangers I may have to face, I pray that in all things, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, I may draw ever closer to You with a genuine attitude of praise and thanksgiving for all that You have done in my life. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Ezekiel was to act out the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, presumably in his front yard with a small constructed model of the city ... for four hundred and thirty days, which is just over sixty-one weeks. The whole process was to attract attention. Prophesying Ezekiel style is hard work, and also a little weird. Lying on one's side for this length of time was bound to arouse curiosity. Keep in mind that Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed, but Ezekiel and others have already been captured and exiled to Babylon.

Various theories have been taught regarding this time period representation. Each day represents a year; that much is clear. This prophecy would have been about seven years before the actual fall of Jerusalem in 586BC. It must have been quite a sight for people passing by. Ezekiel's position of lying on his left side while prophesying against the sins of Israel, and on his right side when prophesying against the sins of Judah was very specifically designated by God.

Ezekiel had to cook his food over a fire made with cow dung (the alternative was worse; how kind of God to give him the choice!) You can imagine the odour coming from a fire fuelled by manure! One thing is for sure, it was God's purpose for Ezekiel to be noticed and heeded by the Jewish exiles. My prayer is that you and I and the church today would have the heart of Ezekiel who cared only to obey God implicitly that he might see His glory. He was prepared to be deemed a weirdo for the Lord to be known and heeded, and that is pretty impressive. As we tell others about our God, we mightn't have to be as dramatic as Ezekiel but it would be good to be every bit as passionate. Pray passionately for those who have never known the love of the Father, that that love may infiltrate their hearts as we continue to make Him known in every way possible.

Pray

Father, I know I may not have to do anything as outlandish as Ezekiel but I want to be one who is noticed by unbelievers. I want people to see Christ in me which is the hope of glory. By Your Holy Spirit, give them a supernatural sense of Your hand and heart at work. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Ezekiel 5

Live

These are harsh chapters with a God whose patience has all but run out. Judgment is coming on this disobedient nation. All of the ancient prophets speak in the most eloquent and frightening terms of the wrath of God. God's anger against sin is a much more terrible reality than most of us suppose. The modern conception of God has reduced Him to the status of a benevolent old granddad so indifferent to the sins raging in His presence that He would scarcely punish anybody. People say, 'Is He not a God of love?' Indeed, He is, but this must also be reconciled with His unmitigated anger against and intolerance of all sin. That's why we need to be thankful that under the New Covenant, God looks to Jesus and pardons us. How amazing is that!

God is certainly not mocked and is ruthless when it comes to sin. Think of the lengths He had to go to in order to deal with our sin, placing it under the blood of Jesus, His well-beloved Son. Our deepest longings find their origin and fulfilment only in Christ. Our greatest brokenness finds its healing only through Him. It's not by the merit of our efforts nor by the measure of our sincerity. We belong to God because Jesus came and gave Himself for us. Let's be ever thankful that no one and nothing can ever change that.

It seems that Ezekiel hadn't visited the local barber while his sixty-one-week prophetic message was being delivered, so he is obviously a pretty hairy bloke. Taking a sharp sword to shave his head and face sends a shiver down my spine but this shave and all the directions of burning and dividing are showing the intentions of judgment on this people. I love how God is a God of order and not disorder. We see this over and over again in the Old Testament. The directions are meticulously thought out and weighed in the heavenly court room and supplied to these prophets in highly detailed order.

Pray

Father, I can come before You today because You chose me to be Your own and You fulfilled every promise You made through Jesus on the cross. How blessed I am. I love You and I stand redeemed today. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

It's quite unbelievable how far the people of God had fallen. The reason for the forthcoming destruction of all the land of Israel is stated in this chapter. The hateful, blatant worship of the Baal fertility cults, of Astarte, of Molech, and of the whole package of pagan gods and goddesses had effectively brought about the total moral depravity of the people. God's chosen people were lavishing in drunken orgies, child sacrifices, and everything else in between. At this point, they had become even worse than the godless Canaanites whom God had removed from Palestine because of their sins. God says, *"I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from Me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols."*

How's your heart before God today? Are there any idols you can pinpoint? Remember, the definition of an idol is anything that comes before God. It would be so easy for us to jump into judgment before taking a good look at our own lives. While the outward activities of God's people in this chapter were nothing short of disgusting, sometimes we, in this day and age, can just be really good at cover up. Our attitude to other people sometimes stinks, leaving us no justifiable cause to point a finger.

It is interesting that the chapter starts out prophesying against the mountains. These detestable things were usually practiced on high places looking over a region. The phrase, *"And ye shall know that I am Jehovah"* is found some sixty times in Ezekiel and was the customary way of concluding a prophetic declaration in the book. There seems to be a little ray of light in the middle of the chapter when God says He will let a few escape destruction, but not before He would allow them to be broken. I'm reminded of Tozer who said, *"Seldom does the Lord use a person until they have been hurt deeply."* It's not the nicest thought, but does hold some depth to it.

Pray

Father, today I come to You not with judgment on my lips but with repentance in my heart. Forgive me, Father, for the way I neglect my calling at times and operate in the flesh instead of the Spirit. I love You, I really do, and I love the redeeming nature of Jesus. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I came upon John R. Dummelow's commentary of this passage; he has an excellent summary of the whole chapter: "Here is a final message of doom upon the whole land; the judgment is inevitable and close at hand; social relations will be broken up; preparations will be of no avail; wealth misused for idolatry and luxury will become the spoil of the heathen; priests, prophets, king and nobles will be helpless to deliver; the Temple will be profaned, and the remnant shall be overwhelmed with sorrow."

Israel had fallen into the trap of relying on its own prosperity and possessions instead of on the God who had given them all things. They were worshipping the creature and forgetting their Creator. Verse 26 speaks of the prophets, priests, and elders – the three sources from whom the people should have been able to receive spiritual guidance and counsel. The thought here is that every avenue of spiritual help was closed. They would look in vain for a vision from the prophet, receive no teaching from the priests, and get no counsel from the elders. A world which has turned its back upon the source from which it derives its life, as Israel had done, is on the very brink of ruin.

It's quite scary how the chapter closes, "*Then they will know that I am the Lord*". That day will come again when every tongue, tribe, and nation will bow their knee, and then they will know that He is the Lord. When we read this chapter, it confirms in our hearts, yet again, that God is in complete control, that He is working all things together after the counsel of His will, that He is working all things for our good and for His glory. None of us can add one minute to our lives by our worry, stress or anxiety (which we need to realise all fall under the category of sin anyway!) These are daunting chapters showing that we have a God who, while longsuffering, will not be made little of forever.

Pray

Father, I often long for the magnificent day when You will be exalted among the nations, the day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that You are Lord. But right now, I long for You to be exalted in situations that weigh heavy on my heart. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

God revealed to Ezekiel the evil and disgusting things going on within the Temple itself. Things had improved under the reign of King Josiah, but Jehoiachin had quickly restored all of the abominations of Manasseh's evil reign. As we journey into the next four chapters, we will see how and why God had to remove Himself from this depravity. Chapters 8 to 11 contain the second of Ezekiel's visions while he is living in exile in Babylon. The exile community is still hoping that God will save them and they are seeking Ezekiel's word on the matter.

Ezekiel is transported in a vision to the Temple in Jerusalem and God shows him four examples of the idolatrous worship taking place on Temple grounds. Ezekiel is first transported to the north gate and he sees what is called the "*image of jealousy*". This is an idol of some kind, probably an Asherah pole. God then leads him to a secret room that was built on the Temple grounds where 70 elders of Israel are worshipping Egyptian gods painted on the wall. These elders are supposed to be the leaders of Israel but they are hiding in a room to conduct their own form of idol worship. They believe that God has forsaken the land and thus cannot see them. God then moves Ezekiel back to the north gate and there he witnesses a group of women worshipping the god Tammuz. The fourth example involves 25 Levitical priests in the inner courtyard facing toward the east and worshipping the sun. Note that facing toward the east means that their backs were toward the Temple. They had figuratively and literally turned their backs on God.

We see God's glory appear in verse four. How surprising it is that the image of God's glory should have been visible at all in the Temple at this time. It is a comment upon the mercy and forbearance of God that even at this late date and in spite of the horrible apostasy of the rebellious people, God still allowed this image of Himself to appear in the house dedicated to His name.

Pray

Father, only You understand the ways of the human heart and only You can cure its great sickness caused by sin. Help me to walk in greater humility before You and in more kindness towards others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter continues the theme of chapters 8 to 11 by recording the first stage of the removal of God's presence. Clearly, the six men were supernatural beings, most likely angels. In the New Testament, angels are represented as aiding Christ in the execution of judgment. A seventh "man" appears with a writing kit; his evident superiority over the six and his having charge of marking the faithful suggests his identity as the pre-incarnated Christ. I love this study of angels and supernatural beings; it fires me up to live in the Kingdom to which I belong. I also love how God sends the pre-incarnate Christ to seek out and mark the remnant of the faithful; God only sends the best for His people!

The place where one should have been able to find a few faithful believers was surely in the holy Temple, but God commands that the slaughter should begin there. Even the prophet Ezekiel questions God in verse 8, *"Alas, Sovereign Lord, are You going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel?"* There is a great responsibility upon those who know God's Word and are responsible for teaching others. The Apostle Peter indicated this principle in 1 Peter 4:17 *"For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God and if it begins first there, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?"*

There are some daunting thoughts in my head right now, especially around the judgment of those who lead in God's kingdom, and, I suppose, that is every believer in some way. While this judgment is true, it is also true that in Christ we have the riches of grace and love. How can we not sing and make music to Him in our hearts? May God help us to realise that He still desires for us to know the fullness of His joy. Scripture reminds us that Jesus lives forever to intercede at the right hand of the Father for us. Beautiful!

Pray

Father, one day, I will give thanks to You with all my might. All personal inhibitions and sinful limitations will be gone. I will be free at last! May that coming day of unfettered joy greatly shape how I live now. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Here we have a continuation of the major theme of Ezekiel 8-11, the final departure of the presence of God from the capital city of the chosen people. These chapters give me the creeps a little, even the title in my Bible that says, *“The Lord’s Glory Leaves the Temple”*. To think that the chosen people of God could stand back and allow God to prepare His departure is almost unthinkable. It certainly doesn’t get any worse than this. God’s glory demands holiness and the sin of these people demanded judgment.

In verse 2, we have a prophetic act as the angel scattered burning coals over the city. Shortly after this prophecy was given the Babylonians came and destroyed the city with fire. The troubling thing is that after the glory of God left the Temple, it never returned until Jesus came in the New Testament times. This is daunting stuff that makes me look inward at my temple; is it in good shape for the residency of the King of kings? I sure hope so!

It would be so easy for us to climb onto our high moral horse and look down and judge these people, declaring, ‘How could they ever stoop so low?!’ The truth is that we all go through little phases when we do similar things. When we don’t get our way, we try and replace God with something less difficult and more accessible. Or we run from God. And if that doesn’t work, we try to do our Christian duty, thinking our performance will please Him more. The truth is that all of these are false and the best thing to do is rest in Him.

I’m sure none of us consider ourselves to be a moan, but we do, at times, indulge in a critical and cynical spirit. I was hopeless at languages at school but I’m pretty fluent in the body language of irritation and impatience! It would be easy to fall into judgment of Israel in these chapters and fail to lift the mirror of God’s Word to our own soul.

Pray

Father, when I rubbed the sleep from my eyes this morning, I soon realised it wasn’t a speck of dust, but a log had got stuck there. Help me to deal with the log before I look for the speck of sawdust in my brother’s or sister’s eye. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I feel sorry for these Old Testament prophets as their job was so heart-breaking and thankless, declaring messages of doom and destruction. This chapter concludes the section of Ezekiel 8-11 detailing the departure of God's glory. That momentous event is recorded in the last paragraph, which I find one of the most solemn passages in all of the Bible. We're told that the glory of God went up and rested over the Mount of Olives. The Jews have a tradition that it remained there for three years pleading with Israel to repent, which they refused to do, and then it departed. At any rate, the emblem of God's presence left the city, leaving it to its fate. God had abandoned His sanctuary and His city as a result of their downright disobedience, sin, and idolatry. One can hardly imagine what that must have felt like in real terms; one day the presence of God was there, the next day it was gone. It makes me think of what hell must be like, void of the presence of God. That is one thing I never want to witness.

I'm sure you are like me and cannot begin to imagine what it would be like to be void of God's presence. The psalmist asked the question of God, *"Where can I go to flee Your presence?"* The conclusion, nowhere. *"If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast."*

After I studied these last four chapters with tears, I found myself singing this song: *'To be in Your presence, to sit at Your feet, when Your love surrounds me, and makes me complete. / This is my desire, O Lord, this is my desire. This is my desire, O Lord, this is my desire. / To rest in Your presence, not rushing away, to cherish each moment, here I would stay. / This is my desire, O Lord, this is my desire.'*

Pray

Father, my cry is like that of the sweet psalmist of old, *"Cast me not away from Your presence and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me."* In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Ezekiel 12

Live

There is very little need for help in understanding this chapter. The hardened condition of the chosen people, including those of the captivity, had left them unwilling to hear the word of God; and yet, both Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Ezekiel in Babylon continued their faithful ministries. Ezekiel plays the role of a captive led into captivity. The lengths God instructs him to go to are incredible, a last-ditch attempt to make them repent, I imagine.

Against the faithfulness of honest men like Ezekiel there stood false prophets. In those days, even as today, a catchy proverb can be a very bad influence if it is founded upon a falsehood. In all generations, there have been echoes of this same attitude. The Apostle Peter declared that, *“In the last days, mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For, from the day the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.’”* (2 Peter 3:3-4)

Zedekiah was the king when these desperate times happened in Jerusalem and he, with the people, didn't heed the warnings. History tells us that Babylon destroyed the city some six years later. King Nebuchadnezzar would take them into captivity and have Zedekiah's eyes gouged out. It makes me wonder how obedient we would be if God were to tell us to do such a gruesome thing. We are more prone to stand on the side-lines and say the people deserved what they were getting. Our evil thoughts show up in the form of judgment about what others have done and pride over who we think we are and what we deserve. May we rid ourselves of all revenge towards others who have disappointed or hurt us. Let's declare that we won't throw stones at anyone today; rather, we will just throw ourselves upon the mountain of God's incredible mercy. As we do so, we gain the help of the Lord to love fellow ungrateful, rebellious, broken people in our world today. The longsuffering of our God is amazing; His voice is ever to be heeded.

Pray

Father, grant me quick repentances when I judge others harshly or consider myself better than anyone. Fill my eyes with Your compassion, my heart with Your grace, and my hands with Your mercy. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter is all about false prophets. Some things never change. There is a warning in the New Testament about false prophets infiltrating the ranks of the Church in the last days. Ezekiel had already prophesied against Jerusalem, against the cities of Judah, against the priests, and against the king; now, he directs the prophecies against the false prophets. There are at least three reasons for Ezekiel to speak out against these chaps. Firstly, they were prophesying out of their own desires and imaginations and were not following God's Spirit. Secondly, they were doing nothing whatsoever to help Israel, neither building up the wall, nor helping to repair the gaps in it. And thirdly, they were deliberate liars who prophesied lies and then had the audacity to expect God to confirm their lying words. It's quite unbelievable really that they would fly in the face of God like this.

Passages like this leave me quite exasperated that people could prophesy in their own flesh. The problem is that I have felt pressure or expectancy on me to do the same thing; not like these chaps who were after personal and financial gain, but maybe to save face or to impress. May our declaration today be one we hear from Jesus, who said He only did the things that the Father told Him to do. It would be great to make that our goal from this day forth. May our words be few and well thought out under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

False prophets deliver a message that is not from God and does not hold credibility. This can be a false gospel and lies to avoid obeying God's instructions. Many false prophets today are like the false prophetesses in this chapter, those who strengthen the hands of the wicked with their lies and do not turn from their sins. We need to test every spirit. Let us be forewarned and careful of false prophets in this world who use lies that do not strengthen the protection from God around us but lead us into destruction.

Pray

Father, I want to act like Jesus did while He was here on earth. I want to be Your hands, Your feet, Your heart, and Your voice in the circles where I move. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The prophecies here, although directed to a group of elders, concerned all of Israel. It is quite shocking and significant that we read in verse 4 that the idols had been received in the hearts of God's people. This was no slight violation but a fundamental crime against God; it means that they had learned to love the pagan gods and goddesses. Their secret devotion belonged to their idols and not to the one true God. Verse 6 refers to their "*detestable sins*". These sins were lacking all legal and moral restraints, especially regarding sexual purity. The ceremonies with which they had worshipped their idols were dear to their hearts, and they strongly desired to renew such practices. God's word they neither believed nor trusted.

Oh, how the mighty fall! Take heed, my friend, take heed! The battle for our hearts is nonstop, and this war will continue until the day God perfects His salvation in us. What encourages me the most is God's relentless pursuit of more of our hearts. He wants us, He delights in us, and He enjoys us. God already loves you and me as much as He ever will, and His affection will never waver or diminish. His command is given today in verse 6, "*Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!*" May we do so and turn to Him with all our hearts and seek first the Kingdom of God.

I find it funny that these people wanted to keep their hand in with God's faithful prophets. It was almost as if they had turned away from God but kept these prophets as a bit of a fire escape. Every one of us is responsible for our own relationship with our Father. Your pastor or parents or a godly friend can't do that for you. My mum used to say to me, "Son, run to the shop and get me my messages," but when it comes to worship and relationship with God, this is one thing you can't get anyone else to do for you.

Pray

Father, my prayer today is that You would be my first and my last thought, that my eyes and heart would be ever turned to You, my King. I love You, I really do, it's just that sometimes my old flesh gets in the way of loving You like I should, and for that I repent today. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The figure of Israel as God's vine is found throughout the Bible. A few to mention are: Isaiah 5:1 / Jeremiah 2:21 / Hosea 10:1 / Psalm 80:8-19. These Old Testament references are reflected in the New Testament where Jesus Christ appears as the *"true vine"*, that is, the *"true Israel of God"*, according to John 15:1-8. I love how Jesus declared Himself as the true vine in this passage in the book of John. History would suggest to us that this was when Jesus was on the way to Gethsemane from the upper room. He would have passed the gates of Herod's temple where the insignia of the vine could be seen. The disciples, like every Jew, knew that Israel was known as the vine. We can imagine that as they walked past this insignia, Jesus gave one of His graphic illustrations, declaring Himself as the true vine and His Father as the vinedresser.

The revelation of Jesus as the vine is one of the most important in all the Bible, for it shows that as far as Israel goes, they, as a race, are out of it forever. Only Jesus Christ is God's Israel in this generation, and all of God's Israel (in any true sense) upon this earth today enjoy that status as members of the spiritual body of Christ, which is His Church. No one is excluded. Jew and Gentile alike are welcome upon exactly the same terms. No one belongs to God as a result of any racial status, and no one is denied a place in God's family upon the basis of race. *"Whosoever will"* may come. I love this!

Thank God today for choosing us in Christ before the very foundation of the earth. Thank God that we don't need to belong to any sect, denomination, creed or religion. It doesn't matter what colour we are or what class we measure up to. We are part of the great *"whosoever"* and today we can come freshly before the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find help in every time of need.

Pray

Father, I love that I am Abba's child with a true right of sonship before You, my loving heavenly Father. What eternal rights You have given me to the eternal glories of heaven. I am so truly blessed and it's all in and through the finished work of Jesus. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The sole purpose of this unbelievable chapter is stated bluntly in the second verse, *“confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices”*. Israel went from being the chosen bride to the queen to the prostitute. Oh, the scourge of the Fall! Ezekiel discharged this assignment in the most realistic (and some would say revolting) chapter in the Bible. It is pretty brutal language, but the sad truth is that only this kind of language could get their attention.

In the previous chapter, God compared Jerusalem to an unfruitful vine that was fit for nothing but the fire. In this chapter, He takes it a step further and compares them to an adulteress that, in justice, ought to be abandoned and exposed. Ezekiel jumps on the metaphor of the marriage covenant used so dramatically in Hosea 2. He expands and elaborates it, presenting the startling story of the unfaithful wife, Israel fully meriting the brutal punishment of adulteresses in those ancient times. It would seem that God is justifying Himself (not that He needs to) in the desolations He is about to bring upon Jerusalem. He shows the prophet, and orders him to show the people, that He only punished them as their sins deserved. He must show the people their abominations that they might see how little reason they had to complain of the judgments they were under.

While this is most certainly a stirring chapter, it points to a beautiful redemption under the New Covenant. What mercy, what grace; amazing, actually. This chapter, when studied, exposes the heart of every human being. Made in God’s likeness yet stained by the Fall, our hearts, like His chosen nation, are prone to wander and leave their first love. This was God’s rebuke against the church in Ephesus, that they were doing all the right things but with the wrong motive. God is certainly a long-suffering God but there seems to come a moment when the line is crossed and He withdraws His hand of mercy and allows judgment to fall. God is not to be mocked!

Pray

Father, You want my heart not my hands. I repent of my wandering spirit and I re-fix my attention and, more importantly, my heart on You, for You alone are worthy of all my affection and love. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The prophecy of this chapter was directed against another false hope of the nation of Israel, that God's promises to the house of David were an unconditional guarantee that the prosperity of Israel would continue forever regardless of the moral and spiritual condition of the people. They thought that God could not fail Zedekiah without reversing His ancient promises to the house of David. In this chapter, the prophet reveals that Zedekiah would indeed receive the due reward of his evil deeds, and God would still fulfil all His glorious promises to the chosen people. Although from human observation all appeared to be lost, the kingdom of David would be exalted in latter times. There would indeed be one raised up to sit upon the throne of David; that spoke not of an earthly king, but of our glorious Saviour, Jesus. His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God completely fulfilled all of God's promises to David, according to Acts 2:29-35. I love this! We can rest easy tonight, knowing that God is always true to His incredible promises. They are “yes” and “amen” and because we know His Word is true, we can rest our life and eternity on it.

When I study these passages, I wonder what I might have done if I was God for fifteen minutes! That would give me a chance to ... fix people that need fixing; fund ministries which serve Him the best, but struggle with finances the most; bring judgment upon those who've got it coming; alleviate the sufferings of friends whose physical and emotional pain is overwhelming; exact revenge on people who have hurt the deepest and betrayed the most; put an end to human trafficking and the pornography industry; heal broken marriages; and obliterate cancer, once and for all ... to mention just a few! But God is sovereign; He knows the end from the beginning, and while we have our ideas of how things should be fixed, God does all things well for our good and for His eternal glory.

Pray

Father, sometimes I don't have a clue of Your overall plan, but I bow to You today and trust You to see all this through, knowing that ALL things work together for good to those who love You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The distinctions between the righteous and the wicked are repeated over and over again in this chapter with only slight variations. I realised something lovely here, starting at verse 4, Ezekiel uses an illustration of three generations: a just grandfather, an ungodly son, and a righteous grandson. Three of the kings of Judah – Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah – fit the descriptions given here. There is something really profound in this chapter concerning man’s responsibility. While God is always sovereign, you and I must choose to follow after Him. Dieticians say, “You are what you eat.” I say, “You are what you choose!”

Verse 24 needs a mention as it has led to some misunderstanding. This is not speaking of a person falling and committing one sin; this is a person who began living for God, but then changed his lifestyle back to the sinful way. We find in 2 Peter 2:21 just how bad this is: *“For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.”* We see that it is a very serious thing to turn away from God back into the world. But before you think this is saying that someone can lose their salvation, this is not what is being said. In the case of the Jews, they began to live in the Word only to turn back after listening to false prophets and teachers. Their former apparent righteousness was not genuine, and God did not remember it as a valid expression of faith.

When I find nuggets of truth in the Scriptures it reminds me how amazing and in control God really is. We need to be careful of loving our theological tribe much more than we love other parts of the Body of Christ. We can jump quickly at being right over being kind. Perhaps we need to ask for forgiveness for defending God’s sovereign grace ungraciously, forgiveness for thinking to ourselves, “We get this so much more than they do.”

Pray

Father, forgive me for using Biblical knowledge to put up walls, rather than to build bridges. I realise that I am so dependent on Your mercy and grace every day, and especially this day. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

There are two laments here, the first under the allegory of a lioness and her whelps (verses 1-9), and the second under the figure of a vine (verses 10-14). The proper term for this writing is a “dirge”. At this point in Israel's history, there were no rulers of the kingdom that any man could trust. The wickedness of the ungodly men Ezekiel had just described in the previous chapter was a true picture of Israel's kings, best described as a den of wild animals! All of them were doomed to death. A dirge was usually sung or chanted after the death of a person during the funeral, but here Ezekiel expressed the Lord's sadness over the failure of the Judean leadership by chanting this over her rulers before their deaths occurred. Very daunting stuff. It makes me realise that I cannot mess about with the things of God.

The lioness is the nation and her whelps are the kings. One of her whelps who became a young lion was Jehoahaz who succeeded the ill-fated Josiah. Jehoahaz had been on the throne for only three months when he was brought in chains by Pharaoh-nechoh the Second into the land of Egypt, where he died in humiliation. Another whelp who became a young lion is Jehoiachin. Like Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin ruled for only three months before he was deported, this time by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon. The statement that this young lion “*laid waste their cities*” refers to the terrifying reign of Jehoiachin.

Every difficult season of life, all the emergencies and broken promises, is anticipated in God's Word. We need to be thankful for God's warnings and wisdom that chapters like today's give us. Few things hurt as much as broken trust and these leaders certainly broke their trust in God. We all know from experience that if we stay in any earthly relationship long enough, we will be disappointed and we will be a disappointment, BUT God never fails. His hope is a hope that does not disappoint ... ever!

Pray

Father, I come to You today and I collapse on Jesus – the only One who can sustain the weight of relationship and never disappoint. This is what makes Jesus so beautiful and dependable. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In this chapter, Ezekiel gives a big-picture view of the history of Israel. He breaks it into two parts: her rebellious past (verses 1-31), then her glorious future (verses 32-44). The first section surveys all that the Lord had done for the nation and the nation's desperately weak response. So wicked had the Israelites become that God gave them over to their own evil practices in the hope that horror at their own deeds would shock them into repentance.

The mood changes at verse 33 where in a series of *"I will"* statements, the Lord declares what He will accomplish on behalf of His people. The final verse summarises the spiritual changes that will transpire, *"You shall know that I am the Lord"*. Such a strong statement from a strong and powerful God, who, as Scripture reminds us, will not be mocked; we will reap what we sow.

It would seem that the Old Testament largely records the sins of the chosen people, those who repeatedly murmured, rebelled, rejected, and disobeyed God's commandments. It would be nearly impossible to count the apostasies that marked Israel's history and the numberless times when God overlooked their transgressions, renewed the covenant with a succeeding generation, and even blessed them when justice required the opposite response.

Verses 40 and 41 predict the separation between Israel and Judah will one day come to an end. This points to the New Covenant when in Jesus' kingdom, Jews and Gentiles alike shall be gathered into the kingdom of God. Rejoice, our God does all things new! It is easy when reading the Old Testament to become disillusioned, if even a little hopeless, but thank God He had a plan, a mystery to be revealed, an eternal hope. Thank God that we get to be a recipient of such a plan. We have been chosen in Christ even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). I love this. We didn't deserve it and didn't have to work for it; we just accept and step into it.

Pray

Father, I realise today that my eternal inheritance is quite safe as it is in the eternal vaults of a holy God who just happens to be my Abba Father, and who also happens to love me implicitly. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter is known by some commentators as “The Song of the Sword”. The word “*sword*” occurs over a dozen times in 32 verses. Charles Feinberg said, “No chapter in the Bible speaks more prominently and fully of the sword of the Lord than does this chapter which has been called the sword song or the prophecy of the sword.” This is God's explanation of the parable of the great judgment that was presented in the previous chapter, the parable which the stubborn sinners who heard it pretended not to understand. They certainly could not miss the point of this explanation. In this chapter, we have the sword “*sharpened*”, “*polished*”, “*swift as lightning*”. When the Lord speaks, He means business; anyone with half a brain best sit up and listen.

God directs the prophet to declare in plain language what He had ordered him to speak in a more hidden form in the previous chapter from verses 46-48. The prophet’s face being turned toward Judea and Jerusalem, God addresses them as if they were present before Him. He declares, “*I am against you*”. Because of their constant and blatant sin, the judgment of God was unleashed. “*By the sword*” means the same as “*by the fire*” in the previous chapter, namely, everything which destroys. It shows us the fickleness of human nature when it is devoid of the Spirit of God. In our fallen state, we default to selfish ambition and revelling in sin.

I’m sure you feel like I do today, that I really need to listen to His voice. “Speak Lord, Your servant is listening!” I'm so thankful that we don't hope in hope; we hope in the Lord because outside of Him we don't have much going for us. It's not about crossing our fingers and hoping for the best; it's about the cross and accepting that we have the best – Christ in me the hope of glory. It's about seeing Jesus and everything He has already accomplished for us. It's about seeing our future in God's merciful and mighty palms, for He has made promises He alone can keep, and will keep.

Pray

Father, today I abandon myself to the advancing of Your kingdom. You are faithful and You are loving, and that's all I really need to remember. I trust in You alone. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter falls naturally into three divisions; there are three oracles, each of which begin with the solemn words: *“The word of the LORD came to me, ‘Son of man’...”* (verses 1, 17, 23). Only the first of these is directed against Jerusalem, *“city of bloodshed”* or, as some texts say, *“the bloody city”*. The other oracles concern Israel and the land. The sins that Jerusalem stands charged with are exceedingly sinful: murder, idolatry, disobedience to parents, oppression and extortion, profanity of the Sabbath and holy things, lewdness, and adultery. There was no thought at all of God. Sinners provoke God because they forget Him.

There is a little statement in verse 4 which has caught me, *“You have brought your days to a close, and the end of your years has come.”* This means that we can always see the longsuffering of our God. He has never been willing that any should perish, nor has He punished individuals or nations until they had passed through a state of non-repentance. As long as there is hope of change, God is always willing to spare the punishment a while longer. This indeed is beautiful! When I think of God’s longsuffering, I think it is like standing in front of a gushing fire hydrant or standing under a mighty waterfall; it’s hard to stand up to the rush of so much mercy, forgiveness, glory, and grace; it’s simply overwhelming.

These people are brought into the refining furnace of God’s judgment where no dross can survive. All orders and degrees of men had helped to fill up the measure of the nation’s guilt. Those who had power abused it, and the buyers and sellers found some way to oppress one another. Verse 30 is one of the most heart-breaking verses in Scripture. God looked for one person to stand with Him, one person to stand in the gap and fight for God on behalf of the land. He couldn’t find even one person. How desperately sad.

Pray

Father, what a generous God You are! You have given me a completely forgiven past, a present standing in grace, and a future of unimaginable wonder. Continue to change my heart with the gospel of Your grace. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Ezekiel compares the northern and southern kingdoms to two sisters who became prostitutes. Jerusalem had long looked with scorn on her sister city Samaria, thinking herself so much better and more worthy. But here God calls them both to account for their idolatry and sin. As a matter of fact, God seemed sterner with Jerusalem because she should have learned from the sins of her sister. One can just imagine the small kingdom of Israel looking with awe and envy upon the mighty empire of the Assyrians. Even though they feared them, they were taken in by their power and wealth, their influence and fame. Israel thought that by worshipping Assyria's gods, adopting their morals, and embracing their customs, they also could gain some of their power and fame. It was a foolish rejection of their covenant God and an embrace of idolatry. One wonders how they could have stooped so low, but then we need to examine our own hearts.

The adultery in this chapter symbolises primarily foreign alliances with pagan nations which always involved the acknowledgement of the gods of those nations. The worship of those pagan gods was immoral almost beyond imagination; the representation of God's chosen people as two sisters who were so depraved in their behaviour is almost embarrassing. It is hard to believe that God's chosen ones could fall so low. He even refers to them as animals in verse 20. Again, the solemn reminder is, one cannot play about with God! It makes me realise that only God is big enough to make my wicked heart righteous. There are no big people or little people in His family, rather, all are the right size. No one is more justified than the other or more precious in His sight. All of us are guilty of pointing the finger and thinking we aren't as bad as him or her! We need to ask God to forgive us when our attitudes and actions contradict these grand affirmations, to forgive us when we become judgmental of others and fail to deal with our own stuff.

Pray

Father, You have told us in Scripture that our hearts are desperately wicked above all things, so today my prayer is, purify my heart, let me be as gold and precious silver refined by the Master Himself. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

When Ezekiel recorded these words, he actually wrote them down on the very day God's message came. God was very specific about this in the first three verses. Important to note that Ezekiel was in Babylon, four hundred miles from Jerusalem and there was no way he could have known the exact day of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Jerusalem, except by the direct revelation of God. There were no mobile phones or computers; such intelligence could not have reached him by any human means. Therefore, when the captives later received news of the beginning of the siege, they had, upon comparing the dates, an undeniable proof of the divine inspiration of Ezekiel. This is why we can fully rely on God at all times!

The pot on the fire represented Jerusalem besieged by the Chaldeans. They ought to have treated all their transgressions as the scum which rises with the heat of the fire and is scooped from the top of the pot. But the truth is, they just grew worse, and their miseries and judgments just increased. Jerusalem was to be levelled to the ground. The time appointed for their punishment may have seemed to come slowly, but it came surely. Such is the longsuffering of God but also the surety of God's word.

God's timing in this story is simply incredible. He is never late, never early, and never out of control. Even when Jesus arrived at Jairus's house and seemed to have missed the moment, He was actually spot on time and raised Jairus's daughter from the dead. Or when He arrived at the home of His friend Lazarus, His welcome from the sisters was, 'If You had been here four days ago Lazarus mightn't have died.' The implication is, 'If You had been here on time.' Yet, again, His timing was impeccable, and Lazarus appeared out of the depths of the grave at the command to arise. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, *"He [God] has made everything beautiful in its time."*

Pray

Father, sometimes I think You're away on another mission that's more important than mine, but for those thoughts I ask You to forgive me. You never leave me nor forsake me and when You speak, heaven, earth, and hell bow down. I love this and I love the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Ezekiel is commanded to speak to four nations. It's not clear whether the nations actually received the words; they were spoken to Israel to highlight the sovereignty of God. The nation of Ammon, which is situated east of Judah across the Jordan, began with the drunken and incestuous conduct of Lot. Because Ammon rejoiced at the grief of others, she herself shall be brought to grief. In the address to Moab, we see how Balaam cooperated with Balak, king of Moab, in his devices against Israel. Moab was situated east of the Dead Sea and it was the "*daughters of Moab*" who seduced practically the whole nation of Israel, including a thousand of its leaders in the shameful orgy of Numbers 25. Edom was situated south of the Dead Sea. The prophet Amos mentions Edom, laying much emphasis on the awful hatred the Edomites had for God's people. Then we have the long-standing enemies of Israel, the Philistines. They were situated along the southern coast of Canaan at the Mediterranean Sea.

All of these nations were a thorn in the flesh to Israel, but God reveals that behind all human events, there stands the Author and Finisher of history who is the judge of all men and all nations. Nothing escapes God's ever watchful eye and while He may be a long-suffering God, He is no pushover and will have the final say. It makes me realise how little control we have over people, places, and things. God is indeed the Author and the Finisher of our faith, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. God is never caught on the hop or out of control; rather, the opposite is true, He is in full and timely control. It's only by acknowledging the limits of our humanity will we rest in the beauty of His sovereignty; only by giving up trying to control our difficult circumstances will we come to rejoice in His well-ordered providences. What is not to love about this God of ours? He is the One who invites us into the eternal dance with the Trinity. It's amazing grace, nothing less!

Pray

Father, I turn from trusting in my own version of "*horses and chariots*" and acknowledge that my trust is totally in You. It is all because of Jesus and His finished work for me that I am redeemed. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Tyre was an exceedingly strong city. Actually, there were two cities, one on the coast and another which was located on a rock-bound island 1,200 yards off the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. Tyre was a seaport of the Phoenicians and we know it today as modern-day Lebanon. They were the vulture-like scavengers on the fringes of every battlefield, waiting to make a deal to buy the prisoners of war and sell them at a profit. On one occasion, they even sold the Israelites to Edom. Back in the days of Solomon, Tyre formed a covenant with Israel, and therefore they probably had some knowledge of Jehovah. The language at the end of the chapter seems to imply there was no redemption for Tyre. The coastal city was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar around 570BC after a thirteen-year siege. The island city is said to have stood until Alexander the Great built a rampart out to it over a seven-month siege around 332BC, fulfilling the words of verses 4 and 14, making Tyre a bare rock and throwing her rubble into the sea. This proud nation was eternally doomed, such is God's anger and judgment against sin.

I'm so glad Jesus came to redeem. I'm so glad I live under the New Covenant of grace upon grace. Chapters like today's remind us that God has to judge sin and that sin cannot exist in His presence. He is all righteousness and when cities like Tyre think they can play fast and loose with Him, they are doomed. Thank God for the divine exchange in which He takes our sin to the cross and deals with it all to the full with the words, "*It is finished*", giving us His righteousness. How precious is that! In making the New Covenant, we are told He became the Just and the Justifier. I have always loved that; it is like a judge condemning his own son or daughter for the penalty of their crimes, giving them the maximum fine, and then removing his gown and wig, stepping down from the dock, and paying the penalty for them.

Pray

Father, I stand amazed in Your presence knowing that when You look at me, You see Jesus. Unclutter my heart and help me to be quiet before You. Help me to be still and wait before You so that Your presence may envelop me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Ezekiel emerges in this chapter as a man of almost unbelievable ability and information; he displays knowledge of world geography, agricultural and manufacturing products associated with the nations of the whole world, and the art of shipbuilding. Tyre was an island that was famous for its maritime activity, hence it is described as a sinking ship, language all would have understood. One has to wonder how much of this incredible store of knowledge was due to the divine inspiration of the prophet, and how much of it was derived from his own personal knowledge.

The account of the trade of Tyre tells us that God's eye is upon us in our business affairs, not only when at church, praying and singing, but when in schools, markets and factories, buying and selling. In all our dealings we should keep ourselves above reproach. God, as the Father of mankind, makes one country abound in one commodity, and another in another, servicing human nature. Trade and merchandise are not meant to be void of the presence of God but rather to be a blessing to us, when done in the fear of God. God allows us to use them and when riches increase, we need to be careful not to forget the Lord, who gives power to get wealth.

The most mighty and magnificent kingdoms all, sooner or later, fall. Those who make 'things' their confidence and rest their hopes upon them will fall with them. Our trust must always be in the Lord, the Giver of all things. In the workplace, as in every other place, we should learn to conduct ourselves according to God's Word. Let us seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Let us align our hearts to beat in tune with God's heart. May our voice echo His desires. May our focus never falter in our quest to follow Him with all honesty. I realise how easy it is to steer off course and follow a shadow, especially our own, but when we read passages like today's, we are suddenly restored to the thought of how God is sovereign over all things.

Pray

Father, You know our thoughts before we think them and Your love for me is incredible. I love how Jesus paid the price for all my sin – past, present, and future. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In the previous chapter there was a judgment on the city of Tyre; today, we see a judgment on the ruler of the city. This was most likely Ittobaal the Second, according to the historian Josephus. Because of his great wealth he declared himself a god which was a huge mistake. Pride is a damning thing and anyone who falls into the trap of it is sure and certain of a fall because Scripture declares, *“Pride comes before a fall”*. We can equate this fall of the king of Tyre to anyone who ever rises in pride above their station. Reading verses 11-19, every line of it can be applied to Satan! The very sin which resulted in the casting of Satan out of heaven and down to the earth was that of pride. The pride of the Tyrian kings afforded a marvellous opportunity for the prophet to call up from the Word of God the example of what happened to Satan as a warning to all the proud kings who ever lived.

The Apostle Peter reminds us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and James says that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Beware of pride, root it out of your life and never allow it place there! Every word of the Bible, in one way or another, is ultimately about what God has provided and done for us. Every command drives me to Him and to Him alone. Every promise is fulfilled in Christ and the finished work of the cross. Every story whispers His name and points to His glory, not to ours. We are told in Romans 8 that absolutely nothing can separate us from His love for we have been called according to His purpose which will never fail or disappoint. Pride has no place in the realms of glory; it was the sin that created the whole downfall of the human race; therefore, it will not be tolerated in the kingdom of God.

Pray

Father, You set Your affection upon me before the world began and You made me for Yourself. One day, I will be fully like You and with You forever. What a glorious hope that is, and it's all because of Calvary and the work of the cross. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The first sixteen verses in this chapter are an introduction to the entire four chapters against Egypt. They describe the fate of Egypt, call out the sins of which she was guilty, indicate the nature of her judgment, and declare her future place among the nations of the world. Carnal minds pride themselves in their property, forgetting that whatever we have, we received it from God, so why should we ever boast? Self is the great idol which all the world worships and which flies in the face of a holy God. Egypt shall be a kingdom again, but it shall be the basest of the kingdoms; it shall have little wealth and power. History shows the complete fulfilment of this prophecy. God, not only in justice but in wisdom and goodness to us, breaks the feeble supports on which we lean, that they may no longer be our confidence. The history of nations explains ancient prophecies as all events fulfil the Scriptures.

I love verse 21 as it reminds us of the horn that will grow up, the Messiah our true Redeemer and Saviour. This promise of the ultimate victory of the people of God is a hallmark of true prophecy. One of the things I love about studying Old Testament prophecies is the little glimmers of hope and redemption that keep popping up, reminders that our Redeemer ever lived and lives! These reminders help us to understand the glorious implications of the promised Messiah. His dominion is the only eternal dominion for His kingdom endures from generation to generation. There never has been, nor will there ever be, any nervous sweat, furrowed brows or anxious pacing in heaven. There'll never be one moment of consternation in the corridors of paradise, no need for a contingency plan to emerge from God's eternal boardroom. He is in full control and plan 'A' is still working out. We can rejoice that we get to play out our part in the eternal God-story, living it out in our families and jobs. I love this!

Pray

Father, I choose to lift my eyes to heaven today and fix my gaze on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of my faith. He alone is worthy of all honour, glory, and praise, and so, I call out to You today and say, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!" In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The “*Day of Jehovah*” mentioned in this chapter cannot be separated from the facts surrounding that final and eternal “*Day of the Lord*” when His righteous judgments shall be executed upon the fallen and rebellious race of Adam. It is that day of doom and destruction mentioned in Genesis 2:17 when God said, “*In the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die!*”

The prophecy of the destruction of Egypt is pretty full on. Those who take sides with God's enemies shall be with them in punishment. The king of Babylon and his army shall be instruments of this destruction. God often puts one wicked man against another. No place in the land of Egypt shall escape the fury of the Chaldeans. There is no point in trying to win a battle against a holy God who is over all. It is worthless energy to even attempt such folly because when God has decided to come against a nation, it is doomed. There are many other judgments of God executed upon wicked nations, just like the one prophesied here for Egypt, yet these are but token judgments pointing forward to that great and final day when, as John Milton expressed it, “God shall cast his throne in middle air and judge before Him all the nations there!”

You have got to love this; the fully in control God that inhabits eternity; yes, all of it! There is not an inch of space or a moment of time that God cannot say, “This is Mine” and “I was there.” It's all His because He created it and He inhabits it. And He calls you and me His children! And not only that, He declares us beneficiaries to all that is His. What majesty, what grace, what mercy, what splendour, what mystery! When I was a boy, we sang this old chorus, ‘He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth in every mine. He owns the rivers and the rocks and rills, the sun and stars that shine. Wonderful riches more than tongue can tell, He is my Father so they are mine as well. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, so I know He cares for me.’

Pray

Father, thank You for choosing me before the foundation of the earth, for making me Your heir and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. Again, I'm left bewildered at the grace and mercy You so lavishly pour upon me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

A few chapters ago Ezekiel used the analogy of Tyre as a “*great ship*”; today, he refers to the “*great cedar of Lebanon*” as an illustration of the Assyrian empire. The extravagant glory of the Assyrian empire is represented as being the envy even of the trees God planted in the Garden of Eden. The Assyrian empire had existed since the days of Nimrod; it was doubtless considered to be as established and permanent as the earth itself, but because of their pride, cruelty, and sadistic blood-lust, they fell utterly to the Babylonians in 612BC, contrary to all that anyone on earth could possibly have anticipated.

Again, ever so loudly there is a tremendous warning against all human pride, arrogance, and heedless ambition that mortals partake of in their efforts to exalt themselves, ignoring the claims of holiness and righteousness which God imposes upon all who are born into this world, and apparently oblivious to the fact that we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account to Him. This used to really frighten me, and then the Lord spoke to me with one of the most common phrases of the Bible, “*Fear not*”. Usually this phrase appears when *He* appears, and there is only one reason I’m not afraid for the secrets in my heart to be laid bare before Him – because He opened wide and laid bare His heart towards me in becoming flesh and dwelling among us. God dealt with Jesus according to our sins and has rewarded us according to His righteousness. In a day when we all seem to need more gadgets and gimmicks to create worship experiences, may God free us from needing anything more than the gospel of Christ to worship Him the way He truly deserves and delights to be worshipped. May He pull us back any time we move away from sincere and pure devotion to Christ and teach us how to steward technology, not become a slave to it. Let’s worship Him today in Spirit and in truth!

Pray

Father, I love how I find You not only in the big and wonderful but also in the small and mundane. Help me not to always seek the spectacular but become a true worshipper who worships You in Spirit and in truth, no matter what is going on in my life. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is the sixth prophecy against Egypt and it takes the form of a funeral lament. It contains some pretty harsh stuff, like God hauling Pharaoh up in His net and feeding him to the birds and animals. Strong stuff this. These prophecies allow us to look at ourselves and they show something of this present world and the journey of death in it. We see the state of human life in our time, with fifty-six million abortions in the world last year (2018). One can only think of the grieving in the heart of God at such atrocities.

As if people did not die fast enough, they seemed to be ingenious at finding out ways to destroy one another. These are the created beings of God Himself, created in His image to be image bearers to the world. Yet we know how sin entered the world and how people are deceived by Satan! What are the objects they pursue through scenes of bloodshed and their many sins? People destroy themselves in vain whether they pursue wealth, fame, power, or pleasure. John 5:28,29 says, *“The hour comes when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of God and shall come forth; those that have done good to the resurrection of life, and those that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.”* The only way to follow God completely is to adhere to His Word and love Him with all of our hearts. In today’s readings we see the peril of not doing so.

I love the words of the psalmist in 119:9, *“How can a young person live a clean life? By carefully reading the map of Your Word. I’m single-minded in pursuit of You; don’t let me miss the road signs You’ve posted. I’ve banked Your promises in the vault of my heart, so I won’t sin myself bankrupt. Be blessed, GOD; train me in Your ways of wise living. I’ll transfer to my lips all the counsel that comes from Your mouth; I delight far more in what You tell me about living than in gathering a pile of riches.”*

Pray

Father, I relish every morsel of wisdom from You. I attentively watch what You have done. I ponder everything You’ve told me of life; I won’t forget a word of it because it is life and eternity to me. What could be better than spending eternity with You? In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The prophet is a watchman for the house of Israel and it is his business to warn sinners of danger. He must warn the wicked to turn from their ways so that they may live. If souls perish through his neglect of duty, he brings guilt upon himself. How much wiser some people are in their everyday lives than in their spiritual lives! They set watchmen to guard their houses (we fit house alarms), but where eternal matters of the soul are at stake, some people are offended if someone, in obeying the gospel, gives a faithful warning.

The destruction of the old sinful Israel was not the end of God's dealings with His people. The old order would be followed by a new and perfect kingdom. The destruction of the sinful foreign nations would prepare the way for this. The exiles would return to Palestine and a new kingdom would be set up under totally new conditions of worship and fellowship with God.

The remainder of Ezekiel falls into two parts: the first deals with the restoration from captivity (chapters 33-39), and the second deals with the new laws of the future kingdom (chapters 40-48). I love how God's story always has redemption at the very heart. What a blessing to remember God's forgetfulness. He says in Hebrews 10, *"Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary."* God has promised to never remember the sins and lawless acts that we have repented of. He won't deal with us according to our sin or reward us according to our iniquities (see Psalm 103). On the cross, God dealt with *Jesus* according to our sins and our iniquities. This baffles and amazes me; how wonderful is His love and mercy. But there's even more ... because the gospel is true, God now deals with us according to *Jesus'* righteousness and rewards us according to His obedience. This is the wonderful gospel of Christ!

Pray

Father, I love the way You love me – *agape* love, without even needing a response. How could we do anything other than run into those eternal arms? What a salvation, what a rich standing in grace and firm rooting in Your love. What a God You are! In *Jesus'* strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The shepherd as king, prophet, and priest was an ancient image throughout the Old Testament; the king to supply the food, the prophet to hear from God, and the priest to speak and offer sacrifice to God on behalf of the people. This image was in place for a thousand years before Ezekiel came on the scene. The identity of this good shepherd who will destroy the evil shepherds and rule over Israelites and Gentiles combined is fully answered in the New Testament. The Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, was the total fulfilment; He would never be succeeded by any other.

Jesus is not just any king, but the great and only King foretold here. As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15, *“He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet; and the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”* Under Him, the Good Shepherd, the Church would be a blessing to all around her. Christ, though excellent in Himself, was as a tender plant out of dry ground, and yet, He was also the tree of life bearing all the fruits of salvation; He yields spiritual food to the souls of His people.

Our constant desire and prayer should be that there may be blessings in every place where the truth of Christ is preached and that all who profess the gospel may be filled with fruits of righteousness. It is so beautiful that in the midst of judgment we can look forward to the King of kings and to the fulfilment of His every plan. The psalmist put it well when he said in Psalm 42, *“Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul? Why are you crying the blues? Fix my eyes on God – soon I’ll be praising again. He puts a smile on my face. He’s my God.”* It would be easy to get discouraged as we read in these Old Testament prophecies of the constant falling away of God’s people, but thank and praise Him today for Jesus.

Pray

Father, how lovely and refreshing it is to turn and lift my eyes to look towards the Redeemer, the King of all kings, and Lord of all lords. His name is Jesus, my Redeemer and Saviour. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I was a bit puzzled about why there would be another prophecy against Edom at this particular place in Ezekiel, especially since he had just concluded a pretty brutal one against the same people in chapter 25. I think this is simply to emphasise that no wicked nation on earth would be allowed to interfere with God bringing His righteous remnant back from Babylon and establishing them again in their ancient homeland at the end of their punishment. No one, no thing, and no devil can stand against God. He will build His Kingdom and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

This general section of Ezekiel brings encouragement and hope to Israel and promises future restoration. Part of that hope was the assurance that God would deal with their enemies, such as ancient Edom. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau and the Israelites were the descendants of Jacob. Brothers with a contention even in the womb, they lived in a state of enmity. It would seem their descendants were happy to keep the feud alive.

Today we are reminded of God's unique power and might. He is an awesome God who does all things well. He does not always do what we want or expect, but He certainly does all things well. When a people or a nation have God against them, they have all the power of the Word of God against them. Those who have a constant hatred for God and His people (as the carnal mind has) can only expect to be made desolate forever. When we see a world of disappointments, losses, and emptiness, when we watch politicians in all the nations talk the talk, we see how shallow the world system really is. I often think of the multitude of words spoken and how not one is unknown to God, not the most idle word nor the most daring is above His rebuke. In the destruction of the enemies of the Church, God designs His own glory and we may be sure that nothing will come short of His purpose and design.

Pray

Father, You pull down kings and decimate the most powerful of foes. You resist the proud, yet You give grace to the humble. Today, again, I pledge my allegiance to such a mighty King. I love You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We see two things in this chapter: the physical return of Israel to their homeland and spiritual restoration. Thank God for the New Covenant. There is no other formula by which ancient peoples who missed their opportunities shall be able to find them again. The Saviour wept over their loss in Mathew 23:37. *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”* All peoples must come to God through the finished work of Christ on the cross. He alone is the door! Those who put reproach on God's people condemn themselves because God promises favour to His chosen Israel. When God returns in mercy to a people who return to Him, all their grievances will be set right.

God continued His words directed to the land of Israel. Some old scholars have felt uncomfortable with these prophetic passages that focus on Israel's future in her promised land. They feel such promises contradict the principle that God is Lord over *all* the earth. I came on Taylor's commentary on this: *“To those who feel that this is altogether too materialistic a concept of God and too constricting for the God of the whole earth, the enlightened Israelite would probably answer that it is no more unreasonable than that the God of all time should declare one day in seven as his own and that the God of all nature should claim a tenth of its produce for himself. Authority over the whole is witnessed to by the surrender of the part.”* I love that. It makes me want to fill my heart as full as possible with God.

Isaiah reminds us that the government of the whole world already rests on His shoulder. Knowing those shoulders fully bore the sin of the world, including mine, is truly amazing. He is Wonderful Counsellor, my righteousness, holiness, and redemption. He is Mighty God, Creator, and Sustainer of the entire universe. He is our Everlasting Father! Beautiful!

Pray

Father, I could never have been able to cry, *“Abba Father”*, if Jesus had not first cried, *“It is finished.”* Thank You for Your broad shoulders, redeeming grace, and immeasurable mercy and love. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The first fourteen verses are a vision of the valley of dry bones. This was a vision to teach the captive nation of Israel that they will be brought home, an event appropriately illustrated as a whole army that had been slain being suddenly raised to full life and strength! This would be viewed as totally unimaginable and impossible; however, it occurred. I love that God can bring beauty out of ashes and life out of dead dry bones. I find it interesting that in verse 2, Ezekiel is told to prophesy to the bones. He then describes the noise of the rattling of the bones coming together with tendons and flesh but no breath. Then the prophet is commanded to prophesy to the breath to breathe from the four winds. This is quite incredible as the vast army arose and stood, full of the breath of God.

Is anything too hard for our God? No created power could restore human bones to life; God alone could cause them to live. The wind is an emblem of the Spirit of God and represents His quickening powers. The vision was to encourage the depressed Jews, to predict both their restoration after the captivity and also their recovery from their long separation. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to a prophecy of the reunion of Judah and Ephraim under one king, called here *"My servant David"*, the scriptural name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

As we try to contemplate this great chapter today, maybe we could do so by means of a question: *Can these bones live?* Oh, that we would hear God's voice afresh in our souls today, hear Him say to us personally, *"I will make My breath enter you, and you will come to life."* Allow yourself to be flooded and baptised afresh by the Holy Spirit today, washed clean and made whole in His presence where there is fullness of joy.

Pray

Father, how amazing to belong to a God who can bring life out of death. I feel sometimes like my heart is a pile of dry dead bones. I go through all the motions of life and to the people around me, it looks okay but inside it's not. That's why today's reading is so encouraging. I give these bones to You today. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The identity of Gog and Magog is stated to be the nations that dwell in the four corners of the earth when time will come to an end. Under the deception of Satan, these shall oppose God's people and be destroyed in the great holocaust that shall come at the end of time and the onset of the Day of Judgment. Plumptre's commentary notes, "All of the nations mentioned in these chapters are depicted as coming from the four quarters of the globe. Persia is from the extreme east; Ethiopia or Cush is from the south; Libya or Put represent the extreme west; and the house of Togarmah was in the extreme north." Tarshish is also mentioned, and, in checking my maps, I see that this city lies to the extreme west on the southwest coast of Spain. In fact, all of the places here fall into the category of being from the uttermost parts of the earth or the four corners of the earth.

All of these events will be in the last of the last days. It is supposed these enemies will come together to invade the land of Judea and God will defeat them. God not only sees who the enemies of His church are now, but He also foresees who will be against her in the future, and He lets them know by His Word that He is against them. Though they join together, no matter how many and how powerful they think they are, they will be no match for Him. I proclaim with the greatest joy ... *Salvation belongs to the Lord!* From beginning to end, our relationship with God is entirely a gift of His sovereign and immeasurable grace. What we could never do for ourselves Jesus has accomplished for us, once and for all. I realise like never before that God is in full control; He always has been, and now is no different. There is not an inch of space or a moment of time that He cannot say, "This is Mine," and "I was there."

Pray

Father, I feel safe in Your hand, close to Your heart, and under the shadow of Your wing, like the psalmist of old wrote. Your eternal eye is always on me, so I thank You today for choosing me from before the foundation of the earth. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Nearly all of the previous chapter is repeated here. The writer is not describing a second invasion but the same events from a different perspective. He elaborates upon the numbers of the enemy – shown by the quantity of weapons left behind and the long time required to bury the dead. These chapters anticipate a world judgment as the final scene of history.

There are two suppers which God has provided for human beings: the 'Lord's Supper', to which all men are invited, and the 'Great Supper of God'. The first is optional, to remember the Lord in His death; however, if men through their rebellion and stupidity reject this supper, there is another, the 'Great Supper of God'. It is not optional. Those who miss the truth of the 'Lord's Supper' will most certainly be present for this one.

It's unbelievable how many enemies God destroyed for the defence of His people! Times of great deliverance should be times of reformation. Because sin is an enemy, every person should stand against it. We need to pray bigger prayers for those in the public square as they stand up for the cleansing and reforming of our land. And, having received special favours from God, let us cleanse ourselves from all sin. This is a work that will require diligence to search our hearts to the depths, allowing the Spirit of God to fill the space.

The pouring out of the Spirit is a pledge that God's favour will continue forever. He will no longer hide His face from those He has poured His Spirit upon. Let's thank God for instituting the 'Lord's Supper' which He invites all who love and revere Him to attend. Different denominations may remember this in different ways, but when a sincere heart bows before God in self-examination and then eats and drinks in remembrance of the redemptive death of Jesus, that's a worship God will readily receive.

Pray

Father, chapters like this one remind me that You will one day reinstate heavenly order to the world. All will stand before You, one way or another. I repent again today of my apathy and freshly lift my eyes to the throne from where my help comes. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Here we have a detailed description of a magnificent physical temple, loosely patterned after the temple of Solomon only much larger, complete with special living quarters for priests. It had an elaborate system of animal sacrifices and other offerings along with observances of new moons and sabbaths, the whole picture following the Book of Leviticus.

The last nine chapters of Ezekiel are devoted to the salvation of Israel and to that grand new temple in Jerusalem which God promised would be built following Israel's return to the land. Some theologians reckon this is one of the most difficult portions in all the Bible. This chapter describes two outward courts of the temple. Whether the person mentioned here was the Son of God or a created angel is not clear, but Christ is both our Altar and our Sacrifice to whom we must look with faith in all our approaches to God. He is Salvation in the midst of the earth. I love how Psalm 74:12 puts this, *“But God is my King from long ago; He brings salvation on the earth.”*

As God led Ezekiel to Jerusalem, He appointed a guide for the prophet. This man was likely an angelic being, indicated by his radiant appearance. The angelic being had two instruments for measuring; one was some kind of rope or string and the other was a solid rod. The supernatural guide was waiting for Ezekiel and he told Ezekiel to focus his senses and pay close attention.

This chapter makes me want to give praise that we have a temple not made with hands! Jesus came to fulfil every demand of the law for me. Jesus, by His life and death of perfect obedience, exhausted the judgment against us. We have been forgiven and are now robed in His righteousness. We have been sealed with the Spirit and given a new family. We are prayed for every moment and are heirs of the new heaven and new earth. What a prospect!

Pray

Father, I am reminded of this verse that I love, *“When the set time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.”* It wasn't a day early or a day late. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

After the prophet had observed the courts, he was brought to the temple. This makes me think of the Bible truth that if we are faithful in the little, God will entrust us with much. If we attend to instructions in the seemingly insignificant parts of our faith and profit by them, we will no doubt be led into an understanding of the deeper mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

The holiness of God is the central theme of all Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. This chapter details the parts, decorations, and ornaments of the temple: posts, doors, walls, sides, chambers, terraces, stairs, windows, sanctuary, altar, tables, etc. God's detail has always amazed me, from the tabernacle to Solomon's Temple to this temple in the final chapters of Ezekiel. It takes me back to when God created Adam and the intricate detail that went into you and me, God's prize creation made in His own image. It also amazes me that when God's instruction of detail and divine order is followed, God always adds His blessing and glory.

In verse 4, the *"most holy place"* is made mention of. Note how the prophet could enter the regular workplace for the priest, the *"holy place"*, but not the *"most holy place"*. This was where the presence of God would rest in the wilderness with His people. Outside, the shekinah glory cloud could be seen by day and fire by night. As a boy, I used to lie at night and try to imagine what this must have been like, the visible undeniable pointer to the presence of holy God. And yet, today we have the Holy Spirit living in us, abiding 24-7, 365 days a year as our Helper and Comforter. I thank God for making us in His own image. How undeserving we feel that God should even think about us, but when we see God's detail in the Old Testament buildings, we are surely reminded we have a Great High Priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities.

Pray

Father, Jesus was one who was in all things tempted like I am, yet He never sinned. What a Saviour, what a plan, what a prospect for me and every believer. Thank You a thousand times over. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter describes something pretty unique, unknown in either the former or the later temple. The first 14 verses give a detailed account of certain chambers for the priests. From verse 14, it is plain that these chambers, although situated in the outer court, were part and parcel of the inner court. We have a special description of the chambers for housing the priests. I love that the Scripture gives us such a detailed inventory of where the priests lived and what they wore. So holy was their job that even their priestly garments could not be taken into a sinful environment, hence the special information regarding the outer court. This makes me realise the importance of holiness unto the unchanging God. Because God has not changed and never will, He still demands of us as He said in Leviticus 11:44 *“Be you holy for I am holy.”*

After a view of the temple and the inner court and all that was in it, the prophet is brought into the outer court. It’s called the *“chamber”* or the *“separate place”*. Whether it is considered to be the temple itself or a building equal to the temple or joined onto the temple, I’m not really sure. But it was important enough to find its way into the holy pages of record to remind us that what we do at home, work, study, play, and church all has the same relevance. This is my learning point today. There is nothing we can boast in of ourselves as Jesus is our only boast, His finished work on our behalf. We can also be confident that the good work of salvation God began in us He will complete for us. We need to discern the good works He has planned and prepared for us in this season of our lives. As we read of the importance God placed on the work of the priests, may He ever impress on us our role in keeping ourselves always before the eye of the Lord in every aspect of life.

Pray

Father, Your Word declares through the psalmist, *“Who can ascend to the hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart and hasn’t lifted up his soul to another.”* May I be that person today. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I know I use this phrase a lot but please don't allow that to take away from the beauty of this passage; I have to say it again ... *I love this!* After Ezekiel had surveyed the temple of God, he had a vision of the glory of God returning. This vision of the return of God's glory to the temple, corresponds in every way with the vision of the departing glory in chapters 10 and 11.

In verses 6-9 we see the reason for God's departure was, as always, sinful human leadership. But then God promised in verse 7 that His glory would dwell there forever, a promise that rested upon Israel's holiness. We also read of the detailed measurements of the altar, details concerning animals sacrificed, the sprinkling of the blood, and even the days when sacrifices were to be offered. This surely points us forward to a time when animal sacrifice would no longer be required, a time when Jesus would sacrifice His life once and for all to pay for our redemption. We would receive this salvation; the whole of the Scriptures would be opened that all mankind may see their sins and repent of them. After all, the Old Testament sacrifices of bulls and goats would only cover up sin, hence they needed constant repeating. But this man, Jesus, after He had offered His sacrifice for sins forever, sat down (something an Old Testament priest could never do) at the right hand of God. Our best services can only be accepted as sprinkled with the blood of Jesus which cleanses from all sin.

Oh, what a majestic and detailed God we serve. The intricate detail in you and me is crafted and created in His very own image. His Word reminds us that we don't actually belong to ourselves. We have been bought with a price, bought with the precious blood of Christ. God's love and compassion for His creation is incredible, even when sin entered the world. It was when mankind was still in their sins that Christ died for them.

Pray

Father, what an amazing gift You have given me, eternal life, not because of what I can do but because of what Jesus has already done. I love this all; how could I not? In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I have often mused over verse 2 and wondered why this gate would be shut, forbidden to be used by anyone else. This gate is not the 'Golden Gate' located in the old city of Jerusalem today as it refers to a temple yet to come. While this chapter contains ordinances which concern the priests, we are told that the Lord, the God of Israel, entered this way; therefore, it must remain shut. I was taught that when we see the word 'therefore', we have to pause and figure out what it's 'there for'. As it is a hinge word or a connecting word, it means the latter statement is based upon the former. So, the reason the door is to be shut is because it was the Lord's entrance and His alone. I think this may also remind us that no other can enter heaven, the true sanctuary, as Jesus did, namely, by virtue of His own perfection and His personal holiness, righteousness, and strength. He who is the brightness of God's glory entered by His own holiness but that way is shut to the whole human race; we all must enter as sinners by faith in His blood and by the power of His finished work and grace.

I love all the types and shadows in the Old Testament and the constant reminders of redemption. I am so thankful that we have a Great High Priest who is holy in every way, One who has paid the full price for my atonement and has sat down at the right hand of God. Priests could never sit because their work was never done, but Jesus finished His work in totality. What a Saviour. I am so thankful for the constant images of Jesus in the Scriptures. The Bible surely is a 'hymnbook' because it is all about Him! It's all about our Jesus, our Saviour, our Righteousness, our Redeemer, the Captain of the host. His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.

Pray

Father, thank You that I don't live under the rules of the Old Covenant. I've been redeemed not with corruptible things such as silver and gold but with the precious blood of Christ. Jesus, the righteous One, became sin for me so I could go free and inherit eternal life. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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This chapter gives instructions for the provision of land for the temple and instructions for dividing up the remainder of the Holy Land to the twelve tribes of Israel. Isn't it amazing that God's plan included the very ground! I love how the first seven verses are centred around a "*holy portion*" showing us that before we allot anything to anyone, God must have the pre-eminence. An appeal is made for the kings of Israel to refrain from violence and from false trading, the oppressing sins of this time. Verse 10 exhorts them to use accurate scales. I think this is great advice throughout every generation. Honesty, integrity, humility, and generosity are the keys of life. It is common knowledge that the merchants in those days had one set of weights to sell to you and another set of weights to buy from you. You don't need to be a prophet to work out what was going on with that system. I worked for years in the coal and oil industry and saw first-hand the many fraudulent ways business was conducted, so-called 'tricks of the trade' that were downright dishonest.

The chapter closes with directions concerning daily sacrifices and feasts. I don't have the page space to venture into these, but they are worth a study. I suppose one of the great lessons is that while we desperately need God, it is important to catch the major thread that runs right through the God-story – co-partnering. God, from the beginning, calls man to subdue and fill the earth and comes down each evening to enjoy partnership in this. This is why I love God so much and thank Him for promising to complete the good work He began in you and in me and in our world. May we all increasingly see the two, God and mankind, working together. Now that He has freed us from all guilt and condemnation, may He free us for more engagement and servanthood in our churches and communities, intensifying our joy in giving ourselves away to others.

Pray

Father, stoke the flames of my compassion for the broken and the lost. Help me to seek You first in everything I do and to be a person of honest scales that I may live and love to Your glory. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter gives the order of worship for the prince and the people, and the gifts the prince may bestow on his sons and servants. The prince is to go through the east gate, which was open only on the Sabbath to mark its being set apart, going to the entrance of the gate of the inner court. It says he is to go no further, but *"stand by the post"*. The details of these things are incredible and it would take ages to unpack all of the relevance; suffice to say that he was there as a representative of the people, yet also as a representative of God. He is to present his offerings to Jehovah while the people, at a greater distance, are to stand worshipping at the outer gate of the same entrance.

Ezekiel outlines instructions for worship on the day of the new moon and the Sabbath, and specifies the gate by which the prince would be required to enter the temple. If one entered by the north gate, he was required to exit by the south gate. If he entered by the south gate, he was required to exit by the north gate. These festival days would have been packed and could have been chaotic, but God had the traffic under His control, keeping the thoroughfare clear. Who ever said God isn't interested in your parking space!

Today, I can only bring us back to Jesus, our Great High Priest. The writer to the Hebrews in 4:15 tells us, *"we don't have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet He did not sin."* Paul reminds us in Romans 8:34 about One who *"ever lives to make intercession for us before the Father."* And Hebrews 7:25 declares, *"Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost they that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them."* There is nothing not to love about our Saviour. May we throw our all before Him today, our Jesus and our righteousness.

Pray

Father, again I feel overwhelmed by the detail of Your love and blessing. My puny little mortal mind cannot comprehend all Your detail, love, and affection for me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love the first verse in this chapter. The Authorised Bible uses the word “*Afterward...*”. There was a returning to something. After all the descriptions and specifications of the sanctuary, God brings Ezekiel back to show him what it’s all about. There is the vision of the great river flowing from beneath the temple toward the east, a river expanding and broadening ever deeper all the way through the desert even to the sea; waters for everyone, to paddle, to wade, to swim, and a depth beyond us altogether; waters full of fish, full of fishermen, bringing growth to nature and healing to the nations. This river excites me! It flows throughout the Scriptures starting at Eden and finishing in Revelation 22. Are you in it? Are you swimming in His boundless love and mercy?

The river in Ezekiel makes me think of Jesus’ words in John 7 that speak of the Holy Spirit filling those who believe in Him, “*Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*” The mighty Amazon River finds its origin above the freeze line in the Andes Mountains in South America, some 17,000 feet above sea level. There, little trickles of water emerge from the frozen ground and flow down the mountain, one little stream flowing into another little stream until a majestic river is formed that gives life to 2,000 different species of fish. As the river flows, it picks up speed and power. It flows for 4,060 miles before it reaches the Atlantic Ocean. Where it hits the ocean, the river mouth is 150 miles wide and it hits at a rate of 60 million gallons of water per second (enough fresh water to run a major city like New York for 12 years) and with such force that it pushes fresh water some 100 miles out into the Atlantic Ocean. What power! Jesus did not promise a trickle or a stream or a flow ... He promised a river. Can you get your mind around this? The Holy Spirit is like a mighty rushing river – a life-giving river. He is like the mighty river found in Ezekiel 47 that produces life wherever it flows.

Pray

Father, I am so glad that I received Your love and mercy. I believe with my heart and I confess with my mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

As we close out this amazing major prophet today, we have a description of several portions of the land belonging to each tribe. As I read about these allocations, I am again drawn to the mysteries, types, and shadows of the Old Testament pointing to what we have in the New Covenant. In Christ, you and I have not just been allocated a plot, but, by faith, are given free access from every side. Christ has opened the kingdom of heaven for all believers.

Whoever will, may come and take of the water of life and the tree of life freely. Wow! And more than that, the Lord, the King of heaven Himself, will be there with us reigning in glory. We will be citizens of a kingdom not made with hands that never fades away nor ceases. This eternal reign of Christ is not something away in the distance; rather, it is going on now. Christ has been reigning ever since the Father committed into His hands all authority in heaven and upon earth, and it will continue until the last enemy, death itself, has been destroyed, according to 1 Corinthians 15:26. Whether people accept Him or not, Jesus Christ is in all and over all.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the water flowing out of the temple teaches that all blessings, material and spiritual, emanate from the presence of the Lord. Paul reminds us of this in Ephesians 1:3 *"All spiritual blessings in the heavenly places are in Christ"*. If you are in Christ today, you are wealthy beyond measure and worth. My Father, of whom I'm an heir, owns it all. I love John Peterson's old chorus that I sang in Sunday School... 'He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth in every mine. He owns the rivers and the rocks and rills, the sun and stars that shine. Wonderful riches more than tongue can tell, He is my Father so they are mine as well. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, so I know He cares for me.'

Pray

Father, sometimes I look around at the rich and famous, I walk down the harbour while on a Mediterranean holiday and see the yachts and expensive cars, and, if truth be told, I like them. Then I read this today and feel like I've just won the lotto. I'm in Christ. What wealth! In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

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