THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

The King Who Breathes Life

Ezekiel, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Breathes Life: The Book of Ezekiel, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Ezekiel might be the strangest book in the Bible. It has spinning wheels covered with eyes, creatures with four faces, a prophet who eats a scroll, lies on his side for more than a year, shaves his head with a sword, and watches a valley full of skeletons stand up and breathe. If you've ever thought the Bible was boring, you haven't read Ezekiel.

But Ezekiel isn't weird for the sake of being weird. He was speaking to people whose whole world had collapsed. They had been dragged hundreds of miles from home. Their temple was about to be destroyed. Many of them felt hopeless, cut off, and dead inside. Some were sure God had abandoned them. Others refused to believe anything bad could happen at all.

Ezekiel's wild visions and dramatic object lessons were God's way of breaking through. They showed that God was bigger than anyone imagined, that sin was more serious than anyone admitted, and that God's grace was more powerful than anyone dared to hope. Ezekiel promises that God can take out a heart of stone and give a new heart. He can breathe life into dry bones. And He promises a day when the name of the city will be The LORD is there.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Ezekiel in seven chapters: wheels within wheels (Ezekiel 1-3), street theater and the departing glory (4-11),

not trapped by your parents' mistakes (12-24), proud empires and the Good Shepherd (25-34), a new heart and the valley of dry bones (36-37), Gog and Magog (38-39), and the river of life (40-48).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who Ezekiel was, where he lived, and why his messages look so unusual. Read it first. It will make the rest of the book make much more sense.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as Gog and Magog or the meaning of the temple in chapters 40-48, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Ezekiel in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the twenty-sixth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Ezekiel is vivid, symbolic, and sometimes difficult. This book explains its historical setting among the exiles in Babylon, its visions and symbolic actions, and its great promises of a new heart, new life, and God's presence. Chapters 16 and 23, which use harsh, adult imagery to describe Israel's unfaithfulness, are summarized in age-appropriate terms without graphic detail.

Where Christians hold different views, this book presents them fairly. That includes the identity of Gog and Magog, where the main Christian views are explained without endorsing any one timeline, and the visionary temple of chapters 40-48, where literal and symbolic readings are both described. The emphasis stays on what all these views share: God's final victory over evil and His promise to dwell with His people.

Real Talk boxes address personal responsibility and family patterns, grief and loss in connection with the death of Ezekiel's wife, pride, toxic leadership, and hope when you feel dead inside. Where relevant, readers are encouraged to talk to a trusted adult or

counselor, and resources such as 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, and the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline are listed.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how Jesus fulfills Ezekiel's hopes as the Good Shepherd, the source of living water, the giver of the Spirit and a new heart, and Immanuel, God with us. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will discover that God can breathe life into whatever feels dead, and that He is there.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

A Priest in Exile

In 597 BC, about ten years before Jerusalem was destroyed, the Babylonians captured the city and carried away the king, Jehoiachin, along with thousands of leaders, craftsmen, and priests. One of those priests was a young man named Ezekiel. He was taken to Babylon and settled in a village of exiles beside the Kebar Canal, which the WEB calls the river Chebar, an irrigation channel near the city of Nippur. Five years later, when he was about thirty, the age when priests usually began serving in the temple, God called him to be a prophet instead. He would never serve in the temple in Jerusalem. But he would see God's glory in a foreign land.

Two Groups of People

Ezekiel spoke to two groups. The exiles in Babylon kept hoping they'd go home soon, and many believed Jerusalem could never fall because God's temple was there. Back in Jerusalem, those left behind thought they were the lucky ones and that God had rejected the exiles. Ezekiel's first job was to shatter those false hopes: Jerusalem would fall. Then, after the news came in 586 BC that the city had been destroyed, his message turned to hope. God would give His people new hearts, bring them back to life, and dwell with them again.

Wild Visions and Street Theater

Why does Ezekiel use such strange visions and acts? Partly because the people had stopped listening. They had heard the same warnings for years and tuned them out. So God had Ezekiel act out his messages, like living billboards, to grab attention and make people ask, What are you doing? These symbolic actions are sometimes called sign acts. The visions, filled with bright images, fire, and motion, are a kind of writing called apocalyptic, which uses symbols to reveal spiritual realities that ordinary words can't fully capture. Ezekiel stretches language to its limits because the God he saw was bigger than language.

Son of Man

God calls Ezekiel son of man more than ninety times. In Hebrew, the phrase simply means human being or mortal. It reminded Ezekiel that he was small and fragile next to the overwhelming glory of God. Later, Jesus used Son of Man as His favorite title for Himself, drawing especially on the book of Daniel, where one like a son of man receives an everlasting kingdom.

The Refrain

One phrase appears in Ezekiel more than sixty times: Then they will know that I am the LORD. It's the drumbeat of the whole book. Whether God was judging or saving, His goal was the same: that people would know Him, not just know about Him. The disasters, the visions, and the promises all point to that one purpose. Ezekiel is ultimately a book about God making Himself known.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Ezekiel 1-3): Wheels within wheels.

Chapter 2 (Ezekiel 4-11): Street theater and the glory departs.

Chapter 3 (Ezekiel 12-24): You're not trapped by your parents' mistakes.

Chapter 4 (Ezekiel 25-34): Proud empires and the Good Shepherd.

Chapter 5 (Ezekiel 36-37): A new heart and the valley of dry bones.

Chapter 6 (Ezekiel 38-39): Gog and Magog in context.

Chapter 7 (Ezekiel 40-48): The river of life and The LORD is there.

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Where This Points

CHAPTER 1

Wheels Within Wheels

Ezekiel 1–3

Imagine you're thirty years old. Your whole life, you've trained to be a priest. You've studied the rules for the temple sacrifices, memorized the rituals, and looked forward to the day you'd finally serve in God's house in Jerusalem. And then an enemy army drags you hundreds of miles away to a muddy canal in a foreign country. The temple is out of reach. Your dream is dead.

That was Ezekiel. And it's right there, in the place where his dreams had died, that God showed up.

"Now in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Thirtieth Year**

Ezekiel dates his first vision to the thirtieth year and also to the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, which was 593 BC. Most scholars think the thirtieth year was Ezekiel's own age. That matters because, according to the book of Numbers, priests began their full service at thirty. In the very year Ezekiel should have started working in the temple, God gave him a different calling. He wouldn't serve in God's house. He would see God's glory far from it.

What Ezekiel saw is one of the most dazzling and confusing scenes in Scripture. “I looked, and behold, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud, with flashing lightning, and a brightness around it.” Out of the fire came four living creatures. Each had four faces: a human, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. They had wings, and their legs gleamed like polished bronze. Beside each creature was a wheel, and it looked “as it were a wheel within a wheel.” The rims were full of eyes. The wheels could go in any direction without turning, and wherever the Spirit went, they went.

Above them was a crystal-like expanse, and above that was a throne, and on the throne was a figure like a man, glowing like fire. Around Him was a brightness like a rainbow. Ezekiel tries to describe it, but he keeps saying things like the appearance of the likeness of. Words just aren’t big enough. Finally he says, “This was the appearance of the likeness of the LORD’s glory. When I saw it, I fell on my face.”

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Four Faces**

In the ancient world, each of the four faces represented the greatest of its kind: the human was the wisest creature, the lion the strongest wild animal, the ox the strongest domestic animal, and the eagle the greatest bird. Together, they suggest that all of creation serves God. Later, Ezekiel identifies these creatures as cherubim, the same kind of beings whose images stood over the Ark of the Covenant. The book of Revelation describes similar creatures around God’s throne: like a lion, a calf, a man, and a flying eagle. Many Christians, since the early church, have connected the four faces with the four Gospels.

Why does this matter? Because the people in exile thought God lived in Jerusalem. The temple was His house. If they were far from the temple, they were far from God. Some even thought the gods of Babylon had beaten Him.

But Ezekiel's vision blows that idea apart. God's throne had wheels. It could go anywhere, in any direction, instantly. It had eyes everywhere, seeing everything. God wasn't trapped in a building in Jerusalem. He was right there in Babylon, by a muddy canal, with a bunch of homesick exiles.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Fair Questions: Was It a Spaceship?**

Some people have claimed that Ezekiel's vision describes a spacecraft or a UFO, and in the 1970s, an engineer even wrote a book trying to design the machine Ezekiel saw. It's a fun idea for a sci-fi movie, but it misses the point. Ezekiel isn't describing technology. He's describing the indescribable: the living, holy God, surrounded by creatures who serve Him, moving with total freedom and power. That's why he keeps saying it looked like or it was the appearance of. Ancient readers would have recognized many of these images, like fire, storm, cherubim, and a throne, from other places in the Bible where God reveals Himself, such as Mount Sinai and Isaiah's vision in the temple.

REAL TALK **God Isn't Stuck Somewhere Else**

Maybe you've moved to a new city. Maybe your family has changed, or you've landed somewhere you never wanted to be: a hospital room, a new school, a hard season. It's easy to feel like God is back where things used to be good, and you're on your own now. Ezekiel's vision says otherwise. God's throne has wheels. He isn't limited to church buildings or good days or the places you feel close to Him. Wherever you are right now, He's there too.

Then God spoke. "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you." The Spirit came into Ezekiel and set him on his feet. And God gave him a hard assignment. "Son of man, I send you to the children of Israel, to a nation of rebels." God told him plainly that the people might not listen. His job was not to make them listen. His job was to speak. "You shall speak my words to them, whether they will hear or whether they will refuse."

God also told him not to be afraid of them, even though, God said, he would feel like he was living among briers, thorns, and scorpions. That's a vivid picture of how prickly and painful the people around him would be.

Then a hand reached out to Ezekiel holding a scroll. It was written on the front and back with words of mourning, grief, and woe. And God told him to eat it.

"Son of man, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your belly and your bowels with it. Then I ate it. It was as sweet as honey in my mouth."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Eating the Scroll**

Eating the scroll was a vivid way of showing that God's words needed to become part of Ezekiel, not just something he read or repeated. He had to digest them. Jeremiah had said something similar, that when he found God's words, he ate them, and they became his joy. In Revelation, John also eats a scroll that is sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. God's word can be sweet even when its message is hard, because it comes from Him.

The scroll was full of sad messages, yet it tasted sweet. That's a strange combination. But it tells us something about God's word. Even when it's hard to hear, even when it confronts us, it's good. It's sweet because it's true and because it comes from the God who loves us.

REAL TALK **Awe**

When Ezekiel saw God's glory, he fell on his face. That's what awe does. It makes you feel small, but in a good way, like standing at the edge of the ocean or looking up at a sky full of stars. A lot of people today rarely feel awe. We're busy, distracted, and constantly looking at small screens. But awe is good for your soul. It reminds you that the world isn't all about you and that

God is bigger than your problems. Try going outside at night, away from city lights, and looking up. Read Ezekiel 1 slowly. Let yourself be amazed.

REAL TALK **Make It Yours**

It's possible to know a lot about the Bible without letting it sink in. You can hear verses in church, scroll past them online, or even memorize them for a class, and they never really change you. Ezekiel had to eat the scroll. That means taking time to read slowly, think about what it says, ask questions, and let it shape the way you live. Try picking one verse and carrying it with you all day. Think about it at lunch. Pray it before bed. Let it become part of you.

Afterward, the Spirit lifted Ezekiel and took him to the exiles at a place called Tel Aviv, which means hill of spring grain. He sat there among them for seven days, overwhelmed. He didn't say a word. He just sat with the people he would serve.

Then God gave him a title. "Son of man, I have made you a watchman to the house of Israel. Therefore hear the word from my mouth, and warn them from me."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Watchmen**

Ancient cities had watchmen who stood on the walls and looked out for danger. If they saw an enemy coming, they blew a trumpet to warn the people. If they fell asleep or stayed silent, the city could be destroyed. God told Ezekiel that he was a spiritual watchman. If he warned people and they ignored him, they were responsible for their choices. But if he never warned them, he would share the responsibility. Ezekiel 33 repeats this calling later in the book.

God also told Ezekiel he would be unable to speak except when God gave him a message. For years, Ezekiel was mostly silent, speaking only God's words. That silence would last until the day news came that Jerusalem had fallen.

REAL TALK **Speaking Up**

Sometimes you notice a friend heading toward real danger: drugs, self-harm, an unsafe relationship, or a choice that could wreck their life. It can feel awkward or scary to say something. But being a watchman means caring enough to speak up. You can't control what your friend decides. That's not your job. But you can tell them you're worried, and you can tell a trusted adult. If a friend talks about hurting themselves or ending their life, don't keep it secret. Tell a trusted adult right away, and help them call or text 988.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ezekiel and Daniel**

Ezekiel wasn't the only young Israelite serving God in Babylon. About eight years before Ezekiel arrived, a teenager named Daniel had been taken to Babylon and trained in the king's palace. The two may never have met, since Daniel lived at the royal court and Ezekiel lived in a village of exiles. But Ezekiel knew Daniel's reputation. In Ezekiel 14, God mentions Noah, Daniel, and Job as examples of righteous people. Daniel was probably still a young man at the time, yet he was already famous for his faithfulness. God was at work among the exiles in the palace and in the mud villages alike.

Ezekiel's reaction to his calling is honest. He says, "So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away; and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; and the LORD's hand was strong on me." He wasn't excited. He was upset. Maybe he was angry about his people's rebellion. Maybe he was overwhelmed by the job ahead. Maybe he was grieving the priestly life he'd never have. The Bible doesn't hide that. And God didn't take back the calling. He stayed with Ezekiel, and His hand was strong on him.

REAL TALK **When God's Plan Isn't Your Plan**

Ezekiel trained his whole life for one thing, and God called him to something completely different. Maybe you've had a plan fall apart too: you didn't make the team, didn't get into the school you wanted, lost an opportunity, or had to move away. It's okay to be disappointed. Ezekiel was. But sometimes the

> place where your plans die is exactly where God shows up. Ezekiel never served in the temple, but he saw God's glory in a way no temple priest ever did. Your story isn't over just because your plan changed.

Notice, too, that Ezekiel's job wasn't to be successful. God told him from the beginning that many people wouldn't listen. His success would be measured by faithfulness, not results. That's freeing. You're not responsible for how other people respond to the truth. You're responsible for being faithful with what God gives you.

Notice one more detail. Before Ezekiel said a single word to the exiles, he sat with them for seven days. He listened. He watched. He felt their pain. Good messengers do that. People are more willing to hear hard truth from someone who has first sat with them in their sorrow. Ezekiel's ministry began with presence before it began with preaching.

KEY VERSE

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman to the house of Israel. Therefore hear the word from my mouth, and warn them from me.

Ezekiel 3:17 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God showed Ezekiel His glory before giving him a hard job?
2. What does the throne with wheels say about where God can be found?
3. What would it look like for you to eat God's word instead of just hearing it?
4. Is there someone in your life who needs a watchman right now?

TRY THIS *Pick one verse from this chapter and carry it with you for a whole day. Read it in the morning, at lunch, and before bed, and notice how it shapes your thinking.*

CHAPTER 2

Street Theater and the Glory Departs

Ezekiel 4–11

Ezekiel had a message: Jerusalem is going to fall. But the exiles didn't want to hear it. So God turned Ezekiel into a one-man street performance.

First, God told him to take a clay tile, which was basically a mud brick, and draw a picture of Jerusalem on it. Then he had to build a tiny siege around it, with ramps, camps, and battering rams, like a model or a diorama. He set an iron pan between himself and the city, like a wall. It was a living sign. Anyone who walked by would see Ezekiel acting out the siege of Jerusalem.

Then God told him to lie on his left side for 390 days, and then on his right side for 40 days, bearing the sins of Israel and Judah. Each day represented a year of the people's rebellion. During that time, he had to eat a small daily ration of bread made from a mixture of grains, like wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt, and drink a small amount of water. It was a picture of the starvation that would come during the siege.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ezekiel's Bread**

The mixed grain bread in Ezekiel 4 wasn't a health food recipe, although some companies today sell bread named after it. It was a famine ration. When food runs low, people mix together whatever scraps of grain they can find. God first told Ezekiel to bake it over human waste, a disgusting picture of how unclean life in exile would be. Ezekiel, a priest who had always kept the purity laws, protested. And God listened, letting him use cow dung instead, which was a common fuel in the ancient world. Even in this strange moment, God showed patience with His servant's conscience.

Then Ezekiel had to shave his head and beard with a sword, weigh the hair, and divide it into three parts. He burned one third, chopped one third with the sword, and scattered one third to the wind. It was a picture of what would happen to the people of Jerusalem: some would die in the siege, some by the sword, and some would be scattered. But God also told him to tuck a few hairs into the folds of his robe. A small remnant would survive.

Why would God ask Ezekiel to do such bizarre things? Because people had heard so many sermons that they'd stopped listening. Words alone weren't breaking through. A man lying on his side for over a year? That got people's attention. People would ask, What is he doing? And then Ezekiel could tell them.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The 390 and 40 Days**

Why 390 days on one side and 40 on the other? Ezekiel says each day stood for a year of punishment for the sins of Israel and Judah. Scholars have suggested different ways to add up the years, such as counting from the building of Solomon's temple or from the division of the kingdom, but no explanation has won everyone over. The number 40 also echoes Israel's forty years in the wilderness. Whatever the exact count, the message was clear: the people's rebellion had gone on for a very long time, and its consequences would be heavy. Ezekiel didn't lie on his side every minute of every day, since

he also had to cook his food. Most think he did it for part of each day in public view.

REAL TALK **When You Stop Listening**

It's possible to get so used to hearing about God that it stops affecting you. You've heard the stories a hundred times. You know the right answers. Your mind drifts during the sermon. The people in Ezekiel's time had the same problem, and God went to great lengths to break through to them. If you've noticed that you've tuned God out, that's worth paying attention to. Try reading a part of the Bible you've never read before. Ask honest questions. Talk to someone about what you're really thinking. God wants to get your attention because He loves you.

In chapter 8, Ezekiel had another vision. He says God took him "by a lock of my head" and carried him in a vision all the way to Jerusalem, to the temple. There, God showed him what was happening behind closed doors.

At the gate stood an idol that provoked God to jealousy. Inside a hidden room, seventy elders were burning incense to images of creatures painted on the walls. They said, "The LORD doesn't see us. The LORD has forsaken the land." At the gate, women were weeping for Tammuz, a Babylonian god. And in the inner court, between the porch and the altar, about twenty-five men had turned their backs on God's temple and were bowing down to worship the sun.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Secret Idolatry**

The elders in Ezekiel 8 were worshiping idols in the dark, thinking no one could see them. They believed God had either stopped watching or had left. But Ezekiel's vision showed that God saw everything, even what happened in secret. Tammuz was a god of fertility and vegetation in Mesopotamian religion, whose death was mourned every year. The men turning their backs on the temple to face the sun were deliberately rejecting God. Their posture said it all.

REAL TALK **In the Dark**

The elders said, The LORD doesn't see us. Maybe you've been tempted to think that about something you do in secret, like what you look at online, what you say in private chats, or a habit no one knows about. But secrets have a way of growing in the dark. God sees, and He sees because He cares about you, not because He's looking for a reason to punish you. If there's something you're hiding that's hurting you, bringing it into the light with God and a trusted adult can be the first step toward freedom.

In chapter 9, Ezekiel saw a man dressed in linen go through the city and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieved over the evil being done there. Those who were marked would be spared. God noticed the people who still cared.

Then came the saddest scene in the whole book. Ezekiel watched God's glory, the bright, burning presence that had filled the temple since the days of Solomon, begin to move. "The LORD's glory went out from over the threshold of the house and stood over the cherubim." The living creatures lifted their wings, and the wheels rose with them. The glory moved to the east gate. And then, "The LORD's glory went up from the middle of the city, and stood on the mountain which is on the east side of the city."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Glory Leaves**

The glory of the LORD was the visible sign of God's presence. It filled the tabernacle in Moses' day and the temple in Solomon's day. In Ezekiel 10-11, God's glory slowly leaves the temple, pausing at the threshold, then at the east gate, then over the mountain east of the city, which is the Mount of Olives. It's as if God was leaving reluctantly, giving the people every chance to turn back. Once His presence was gone, the temple was just an empty building, and nothing could protect it from destruction. Later in Ezekiel, the glory returns from the east. Many Christians note that Jesus ascended from

the Mount of Olives and that the prophet Zechariah describes the LORD standing there on a coming day.

But even as the glory was leaving, God gave a promise. He told the exiles that He Himself would be a sanctuary for them in the lands where they had been scattered. They weren't as cut off as they thought.

And then came the first promise of something new. "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them. I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh."

A stony heart is cold, hard, and unresponsive. You can't change a stone by trying harder. It needs to be replaced. God promised to do the replacing Himself, giving His people a living, tender heart that would respond to Him. That promise comes back even stronger in chapter 36.

REAL TALK **The People Who Still Care**

In Ezekiel 9, God told the man in linen to mark everyone who sighed and cried over the evil around them. In a city full of corruption, a few people still cared. They didn't go along with the crowd. They grieved what was happening. God saw every one of them. If you've ever felt like the only person in your friend group, school, or even family who cares about doing right, God sees you too. Your quiet faithfulness is not invisible to Him.

Why did the people in Jerusalem think they were safe? Because the temple was there. They believed God would never let His own house be destroyed, so they could do whatever they wanted. They treated the temple like a lucky charm. Jeremiah had preached against this same idea in his famous temple sermon. Ezekiel's vision showed what they didn't want to see: God's presence wasn't a possession they controlled. If they rejected Him, He would leave, and the building would be just stone.

But God's words to the exiles in chapter 11 turned everything upside down. The people in Jerusalem said the exiles were far from God. God said, "yet I will be to them a sanctuary for a little while in the countries where they have come." The people who thought they were closest to God were furthest away, and the people who felt furthest away had God with them. God isn't impressed by location. He looks at the heart.

REAL TALK **Do You Know Him or Just Know About Him?**

You can know a lot about a famous person without knowing them at all. You might know their birthday, their favorite food, and every song they've released, but if you showed up at their door, they wouldn't know who you are. Many people relate to God that way. They know facts about Him, but they've never actually talked to Him, trusted Him, or followed Him. The whole point of Ezekiel's refrain is that God wants to be known personally. He doesn't just want fans. He wants a relationship with you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Then They Will Know**

In chapters 4-11, the refrain Then they will know that I am the LORD shows up again and again, mostly connected with judgment. That can sound harsh. But think about it. The people had ignored God's love, His prophets, His warnings, and His patience for generations. Finally, the disaster would make them see what they'd refused to see: that God is real, that His word is true, and that He is not an idol they could manipulate. Later in the book, the same refrain shows up with God's promises of rescue. Whether through discipline or mercy, God's goal is that His people would truly know Him.

REAL TALK **God Leaves Slowly**

Did you notice how slowly God's glory left? It paused at the threshold. It paused at the east gate. It paused over the mountain. It was as if God kept looking back, giving the people one more chance. That tells you something about God's heart. He doesn't storm off. He doesn't give up on people quickly. The Bible says He is slow to anger and full of steadfast love. Even His

judgment comes reluctantly, after long patience. If you've wandered from God, He's not looking for an excuse to leave. He's looking for you to turn around.

KEY VERSE

I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them. I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my ordinances, and do them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

Ezekiel 11:19–20 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God used street theater instead of just sermons?
2. What does Ezekiel 8 show about the danger of secret sin?
3. How do you think Ezekiel felt watching God's glory leave the temple?
4. What's the difference between a heart of stone and a heart of flesh?

TRY THIS *Ask God this week to show you any area where your heart has become hard. Write it down, and pray each day for Him to soften it.*

CHAPTER 3

You're Not Trapped by Your Parents' Mistakes

Ezekiel 12–24

In chapter 12, God gave Ezekiel another street performance. He packed a bag like someone going into exile, carried it out in broad daylight, and then, in the evening, dug a hole through the wall of his house and climbed out with his bag on his shoulder and his face covered. The people watched and asked what he was doing. Ezekiel explained: this is what will happen to King Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem. They would try to escape through the wall at night, and they would be captured.

That's exactly what happened a few years later. Second Kings records that Zedekiah fled at night through a gap in the wall, was captured by the Babylonians, and was taken to Babylon blinded, a place he would never see.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Prophecy That Came True**
>
> In Ezekiel 12:13, God says the prince would be brought to Babylon, yet he would not see it, even though he would die there. That sounds like a riddle. But in 586 BC, King Zedekiah was captured, his eyes were put out by the Babylonians, and he was carried to Babylon in chains, where he died. He was brought to Babylon but never saw it. The people around Ezekiel kept saying that the prophets' warnings were for far in the future. God answered, "I will

> speak, and the word that I speak will be performed. It will be no more deferred."

Chapters 12-24 are full of warnings, parables, and pictures. Ezekiel told the story of a vine. A vine's wood is useless for building. It's only good for fruit. And if it doesn't bear fruit, it's only good for burning. He told a parable about two eagles and a cedar tree, picturing Babylon, Egypt, and the kings of Judah. But at the end of that parable, God promised to take a tender twig from the top of the cedar and plant it on a high mountain, where it would grow into a great tree, and "birds of every kind will dwell in the shade of its branches." Many readers see that as a promise of the coming Messiah from David's family, whose kingdom would shelter people from every nation.

Two chapters, 16 and 23, are among the hardest in the Bible. They use the picture of marriage to describe Israel's unfaithfulness, and the imagery is intense and adult. Here's the heart of what they say, in age-appropriate terms.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Ezekiel 16 and 23**
>
> In chapter 16, God describes Jerusalem as an abandoned baby girl, left alone in a field on the day she was born. No one cared for her. But God passed by and said to her, "Live!" He cared for her, raised her, and eventually made her His beautiful bride, a queen. But she used all His gifts to chase after other lovers, the false gods and foreign nations she trusted instead of Him. Chapter 23 tells a similar story about two sisters, representing Samaria and Jerusalem, who were unfaithful. These chapters use strong, uncomfortable images on purpose, to shock people into seeing how deeply their idolatry hurt God, the way betrayal hurts in a marriage. But even chapter 16 ends with grace. God says, "Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you." His faithfulness outlasts her unfaithfulness.

Then comes chapter 18, one of the most important chapters for teenagers in the whole Old Testament.

The exiles had a saying, a proverb everyone repeated. “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” In other words: Our parents messed up, and we’re paying for it. It’s not our fault. We’re stuck. Nothing we do matters.

God said, Stop saying that. “Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine. The soul who sins, he shall die.”

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Sour Grapes**
>
> The sour grapes proverb was a way of blaming the previous generation. The exiles knew their parents and grandparents had worshiped idols and ignored the prophets. They believed they were suffering because of those choices, and in a sense, they were. Generations do affect each other. But the proverb turned into an excuse: if our fate was already decided by our parents, why bother changing? God’s answer in Ezekiel 18 is that each person stands before Him on their own. The past shapes you, but it doesn’t have to define you.

God then walked through an example. Imagine a good man who does what is right. He doesn’t worship idols, he treats people fairly, he feeds the hungry and gives clothes to people who need them. He will live. Now imagine his son becomes violent and wicked. The son can’t hide behind his father’s goodness. He’s responsible for his own choices. Now imagine that wicked man has a son who sees his father’s sins and chooses a different path. That son will live. He won’t be punished for his father’s sins. “The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.”

And God went further. Even a wicked person who turns away from evil and does what is right "shall surely live. He shall not die." The past doesn't have the final word. Change is possible.

> **REAL TALK** **You're Not Trapped**
>
> Maybe your family has a pattern you're scared of repeating: addiction, anger, divorce, abuse, or something else. Maybe people have said you'll turn out just like your mom or dad. Ezekiel 18 says you don't have to. Your family's story affects you, and that's real, but it doesn't decide who you become. With God's help, you can make different choices and start a new pattern. Breaking a cycle isn't easy, and you don't have to do it alone. Talk to a trusted adult, a pastor, or a counselor. And if something unsafe is happening at home right now, it's not your fault. Tell someone you trust, or call or text the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453. If you're in immediate danger, call 911.

The chapter ends with God's heart on full display. "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? says the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?" And finally: "For I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies, says the Lord GOD. Therefore turn yourselves, and live!" God isn't looking for reasons to punish. He's pleading with people to come back.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Fair Questions: Doesn't the Bible Say Sins Pass Down?**
>
> Some readers notice that the Ten Commandments speak of God visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him. Does Ezekiel 18 contradict that? Most interpreters say no. The commandment describes how sin's consequences ripple through families, especially when children continue in the same rebellion. Ezekiel 18 addresses the guilt of each person before God, insisting that no one is condemned for someone else's sin. Both truths are real. Families shape us, for good and bad. But each person is free to turn to God, and God judges each person fairly.

REAL TALK **Not Your Fault, Still Your Choice**

Ezekiel 18 doesn't mean that everything bad in your life is because of your choices. If you've been hurt by others, that's on them, not you. And it doesn't mean you have to fix yourself by yourself. Ezekiel 18 tells people to get a new heart, but chapter 36 shows that God is the one who gives it. Both are true: you're responsible for how you respond, and God gives you the grace to respond well. You're not stuck.

In chapter 22, God said He looked for someone who would "stand in the gap before me for the land," but He found no one. Then in chapter 24, on the very day Babylon began the final siege of Jerusalem, God told Ezekiel to write down the date. And then God gave him the hardest assignment of his life.

"Son of man, behold, I will take away from you the desire of your eyes with one stroke; yet you shall neither mourn nor weep." God told him not to perform the usual public mourning rituals. Ezekiel writes, "So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Desire of His Eyes**

Ezekiel called his wife the desire of his eyes. He loved her. Her sudden death was a real and terrible loss. God told him not to do the public mourning rituals, like loud wailing, taking off his turban, and eating special mourners' bread, as a sign to the people. When the people asked why he wasn't mourning, he explained that soon they would lose the temple, which was the desire of their eyes, along with their families in Jerusalem, and they would be too stunned to mourn. Notice that God told him to sigh, but not aloud. His grief was real, even if it was quiet. This passage is hard, and it shows how costly Ezekiel's calling was.

In chapter 20, God reviewed Israel's whole history, from Egypt to the wilderness to the promised land. At every step, the people rebelled. And at every step, God says, "I worked for my name's

sake," and kept His promises anyway. The chapter ends with this: "You will know that I am the LORD, when I have dealt with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways." That's grace. God didn't treat them as their sins deserved.

REAL TALK **Stand in the Gap**

In Ezekiel 22, God says He searched for someone who would "stand in the gap before me for the land," but found no one. Standing in the gap means stepping into the broken place, praying for others, speaking up for people who are hurting, and doing what's right when everyone else is silent. You might be the only person in your friend group who prays for your school, or who refuses to join in when someone is being mocked. That matters. God is still looking for people who will stand in the gap. You can be one of them.

REAL TALK **When Someone You Love Dies**

Ezekiel's story in chapter 24 is unusual. God asked him to hold back his public mourning for a specific reason, as a prophetic sign. That doesn't mean God wants you to hide your grief. The Bible is full of people who wept openly: Abraham for Sarah, David for his son, and Jesus at the tomb of His friend Lazarus. If someone you love has died, it's okay to cry, to be angry, to feel numb, or to miss them for a long time. Talk to someone you trust about how you're feeling. A school counselor or grief support group can help too. And if grief ever makes you feel like you can't go on, call or text 988 any time.

In chapter 13, God confronted the false prophets who told people what they wanted to hear. He said they were "saying, Peace; and there is no peace." Ezekiel compared them to people who build a flimsy wall and then cover it with whitewash to make it look strong. When the storm comes, the wall falls down, and everyone sees that the paint was hiding cracks. Their comforting words were like that wall. They looked good but couldn't hold up when trouble came.

REAL TALK **Whitewash**

A whitewashed wall looks fine from the outside, but it's still cracked and weak underneath. People can do that too, covering up problems with a smile, a filter, or a highlight reel online. Friends can do it for each other, saying everything's fine when it isn't. Real friendship and real faith don't just paint over cracks. They face them honestly. If there's something in your life that looks good on the surface but is crumbling underneath, don't just cover it up. Talk to God and someone you trust. Strong walls are built on truth.

In chapter 14, God said that even if Noah, Daniel, and Job lived in Jerusalem, their righteousness would save only themselves. That's another way of saying the same thing as chapter 18: no one can ride on someone else's faith. You can't be saved by your parents' prayers, your grandparents' church attendance, or your friend's devotion. Each person must turn to God personally.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Until He Comes**

In Ezekiel 21, God announced that the crown would be taken from Judah's king. "Remove the turban, and take off the crown. This will not be as it was." He added that the kingdom would be overturned until "he comes whose right it is." Many Jewish and Christian readers have seen this as a promise that the rightful King from David's line would one day come and receive the crown. Christians believe that promise points to Jesus, the Son of David, who was born about six centuries later.

KEY VERSE

The soul who sins, he shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be on him.

Ezekiel 18:20 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the sour grapes proverb was so popular?
2. Is there a family pattern you hope to break? What would help?
3. What does Ezekiel 18:32 show about God's heart toward people who have done wrong?
4. How do you think Ezekiel felt after his wife died? What does his story say about the cost of following God?

TRY THIS *Write down one pattern from your family or past that you want to leave behind, and one new pattern you want to start. Pray about it, and share it with someone you trust.*

CHAPTER 4

Proud Empires and the Good Shepherd

Ezekiel 25–34

After the warnings to Israel, Ezekiel turned toward the nations around them. Chapters 25-32 are messages to Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. Some of these nations had celebrated when Jerusalem fell. Others had tempted Judah to trust them instead of God. All of them would answer to Him.

The two biggest targets were Tyre and Egypt, and the main charge against both was pride.

Tyre was a wealthy trading city on the Mediterranean coast, built partly on a rocky island just offshore. Its ships sailed everywhere. Its merchants were rich, and its walls seemed unbreakable. Ezekiel 27 describes Tyre as a magnificent ship loaded with treasure from all over the world, and then shows that ship sinking in the sea.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Fall of Tyre**
>
> Ezekiel said that many nations would come against Tyre like waves, and that it would become “a bare rock” where fishermen spread their nets. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Tyre for thirteen years, and Ezekiel 29 acknowledges that this siege didn’t bring him much plunder. Then, in 332 BC, Alexander the Great built a causeway out to the island, using rubble from the old mainland city, and conquered it. Over time, the old island city’s site was

reshaped by the sea and the causeway. Scholars discuss how the details of the prophecy were fulfilled, but Tyre's proud independence was broken.

In chapter 28, God spoke to the ruler of Tyre. "Because your heart is lifted up, and you have said, I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the middle of the seas; yet you are man, and no god." Tyre's ruler was so proud of his wealth and wisdom that he thought he was divine. God reminded him that he was mortal.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Fair Questions: Is Ezekiel 28 About Satan?**

In Ezekiel 28:12-19, God gives a lament over the king of Tyre, saying, "You were in Eden, the garden of God," and calling him "the anointed cherub who covers." Because this description seems bigger than any human king, many Christians, since early church writers, have read it as describing Satan's fall from glory through pride, with the king of Tyre as an example of the same pride. Others read it as poetic language comparing the king to Adam in Eden, or to a guardian figure, to show how far he fell. Many hold both together: the passage is about the human king, but it reveals the deeper spiritual pattern behind all pride. Christians agree on the main point: pride leads to a fall. As verse 17 says, "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty."

Egypt was the ancient superpower to the south. Judah kept trusting Egypt to rescue them from Babylon instead of trusting God. God described Pharaoh as a great monster lying in the Nile who said, "My river is my own, and I have made it for myself." Imagine claiming you created a river. That's the kind of pride that forgets every good thing is a gift from God.

REAL TALK **The Problem With Pride**

Pride isn't just feeling good about something you did well. It's when you start to believe you're the source of your own success and don't need God or anyone else. The ruler of Tyre thought he was a god. Pharaoh thought he'd made the Nile. Today, pride might look like building your identity around followers, grades, looks, or athletic success, and looking down on people who

don't measure up. The truth is that your talents, your opportunities, and even your next breath are gifts. Gratitude is the antidote to pride. Try thanking God every day for specific gifts, and you'll find it harder to believe you made them yourself.

In chapter 33, God renewed Ezekiel's calling as a watchman. And God answered the exiles who said, "Our transgressions and our sins are on us, and we pine away in them. How then can we live?" God swore by His own life and said, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why will you die, house of Israel?"

Then the news came. A survivor arrived from Jerusalem and said, "The city has been defeated!" Everything Ezekiel had warned about had happened. That evening, God opened Ezekiel's mouth, and he could speak freely again. From that moment, his message began to change from judgment to hope.

God also warned Ezekiel that people would come to hear him the way they'd go to a concert. "You are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they don't do them." They enjoyed listening, but nothing changed.

BACKGROUND CHECK **What Happened to Egypt?**

Ezekiel said that Egypt would become "the lowest of the kingdoms" and would "no longer rule over the nations." Before this, Egypt had been one of the greatest powers in the world for well over a thousand years. But after Babylon defeated it, Egypt was ruled in turn by Persia, then by the Greeks under Alexander and his successors, and then by Rome. It never again became the great empire it had been in the days of the pharaohs who built the pyramids. The nation that said, My river is my own, learned that only God rules forever.

REAL TALK **More Than a Good Song**

Ezekiel 33:32 describes people who loved hearing sermons but never acted on them. It's possible to enjoy worship music, like inspirational posts, and watch great talks without letting any of it change your life. Jesus told a story about two builders: one who heard His words and did them, building on rock, and one who heard and didn't, building on sand. The question isn't whether you enjoy hearing God's word. It's whether you're doing anything with it.

And then comes chapter 34, where God turns His attention to the leaders of Israel. He calls them shepherds, and He's furious with them. "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Shouldn't the shepherds feed the sheep?"

The leaders had used the people for their own benefit. God listed their failures. "You haven't strengthened the diseased. You haven't healed that which was sick. You haven't bound up that which was broken. You haven't brought back that which was driven away. You haven't sought that which was lost, but you have ruled over them with force and with rigor."

So God fired them. "Behold, I am against the shepherds. I will require my sheep at their hand."

REAL TALK **Toxic Leaders**

Ezekiel 34 describes leaders who used their power to help themselves instead of the people in their care. Sadly, that still happens, in families, schools, teams, and even churches. A good leader serves, protects, and cares for the weak. A toxic leader uses people, demands loyalty, shames people who ask questions, or harms those under their authority. If a leader is hurting you or making you feel unsafe, it's not your fault, and you don't have to stay silent. Talk to a trusted adult outside that situation. If you're being abused, call or text the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453, and if you're in danger, call 911. God takes the abuse of power seriously.

And then God made one of the most beautiful promises in the Old Testament. If the shepherds wouldn't care for the sheep, He would do it Himself. "Behold, I myself, even I, will search for my sheep, and will seek them out." "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord GOD."

God would search for the lost, bring back the strays, bandage the injured, and strengthen the weak. Everything the bad shepherds failed to do, He would do.

Then God added, "I will set up one shepherd over them, and he will feed them, even my servant David." David had been dead for four hundred years. This was a promise of a new king from David's family, a shepherd-king who would care for God's people the way God does.

REAL TALK **You Can Lead Like a Shepherd**

You might not think of yourself as a leader, but you probably lead someone: a younger sibling, a teammate, a friend group, a club, or the kids you babysit. Ezekiel 34 gives a picture of good leadership. Notice the weak. Help the hurting. Go after the one who's been left out. Use your influence to protect people, not to use them. Being a good leader isn't about being in charge. It's about caring for people the way God cares for them.

BACKGROUND CHECK **God and David as Shepherd**

In Ezekiel 34, God says both that He Himself will shepherd His sheep and that His servant David will be their shepherd. How can both be true? Jewish readers have understood this as a promise of a future king from David's line, through whom God would care for His people. Christians see it fulfilled in Jesus, who is both the Son of David and God in the flesh. When Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd," He was claiming the role God promised to take Himself in Ezekiel 34.

Ezekiel's messages to the nations weren't just about pride. Some of them were about how those nations treated Judah when it was suffering. God said to Ammon, "Because you have clapped your hands, stamped with the feet, and rejoiced with all the contempt of your soul against the land of Israel." They celebrated Judah's downfall. Edom and Philistia took revenge. God noticed every bit of it.

REAL TALK **Celebrating Someone's Downfall**

It can feel satisfying when someone you don't like gets in trouble, loses a game, or gets embarrassed online. It's tempting to share the screenshot or laugh along. But Ezekiel 25 shows that God takes gloating seriously. Proverbs says not to rejoice when your enemy falls. Jesus told us to love our enemies and pray for them. When you see someone having a hard time, even someone who hurt you, you don't have to pretend it didn't happen. But you can choose not to pile on. That's what it looks like to have a heart of flesh instead of stone.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why Judge Other Nations?**

Why would Israel's prophets spend so many chapters on other nations? Because the God of Israel isn't a local god. He's the Creator of the whole world, and every nation answers to Him. These messages also gave hope to God's people. The empires that seemed so powerful weren't in control. God was. And they showed that the same standards of justice apply to everyone. God judged His own people first, and then the nations. No one gets a pass for cruelty or pride.

The promise in chapter 34 ends with a picture of peace. God would make "a covenant of peace" with His sheep. Wild animals would be removed, so the sheep could sleep safely even in the woods. "There will be showers of blessing." The rain would come in its season, the trees would bear fruit, and no one would make the sheep afraid. And God sums it all up: "You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are

men, and I am your God." That's the relationship God wants with you. Not a boss and an employee. A shepherd and a beloved flock.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Lost Sheep**

Jesus told a parable that sounds a lot like Ezekiel 34. "Which of you men, if you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them, wouldn't leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that was lost, until he found it?" In the story, the shepherd searches until he finds the lost sheep, puts it on his shoulders, and throws a party. Jesus told that parable when religious leaders complained that He welcomed sinners. In other words, Jesus was acting like the Shepherd Ezekiel promised, going after the lost when the religious leaders wouldn't.

KEY VERSE

I will seek that which was lost, and will bring back that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick

Ezekiel 34:16 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think pride was such a big problem for Tyre and Egypt?
2. Where are you tempted to take credit for things that are really gifts?
3. What are the marks of a good shepherd or leader in Ezekiel 34?
4. How does it feel to know that God searches for lost sheep Himself?

TRY THIS *Think of someone who seems lost, hurting, or left out. This week, do one thing to care for them the way a good shepherd would.*

CHAPTER 5

A New Heart and the Valley of Dry Bones

Ezekiel 36–37

After Jerusalem fell, the exiles were crushed. Their city was gone. Their temple was gone. Their king was blind and in chains. And their hope was gone too. They said, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost. We are completely cut off.”

Have you ever felt like that? Not just sad, but empty, like something inside you has died. Like there’s no point in trying anymore. Ezekiel 36 and 37 were written for people who feel exactly that way.

In chapter 36, God speaks to the mountains of Israel, which had been left desolate and mocked by the surrounding nations. He promises they will bloom again, that people will return, and that the ruined cities will be rebuilt. One day, people would look at the land and say, “This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden.”

> BACKGROUND CHECK **For My Holy Name**
>
> In Ezekiel 36:22, God says, “I don’t do this for your sake, house of Israel, but for my holy name.” That can sound cold at first. But it’s actually great news. If God’s rescue depended on how good the people were, they’d have no hope. Instead, God rescues them because of who He is. His reputation is tied to His

promises. The nations had looked at the exiles and concluded that Israel's God was weak or unfaithful. By restoring His people, God would show the whole world His holiness, power, and faithfulness. Your hope rests on God's character, not your performance.

Then God makes the promise that sits at the very heart of Ezekiel. First, He promises to gather His people from the nations and bring them home. Then He promises to make them clean. "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols."

And then: "I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Like the Garden of Eden**

In Ezekiel 36, God promises that people will say the ruined land "has become like the garden of Eden." That's a big claim. Eden was the place where everything was good, where humans lived in harmony with God, each other, and creation. When God restores His people, He doesn't just patch things up. He brings them back toward Eden. The whole Bible moves in that direction, from a garden lost in Genesis to a garden city in Revelation. God promises, "I, the LORD, have built the ruined places and planted that which was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Heart in Hebrew**

In Hebrew thinking, the heart wasn't just the center of feelings. It was the center of the whole person: thoughts, choices, desires, and will. A heart of stone means a person who is unresponsive to God, unable to love Him or follow Him from the inside. A heart of flesh is alive, soft, and able to respond. In Ezekiel 18, God told people to make themselves a new heart. In Ezekiel 36, God promises to give it. That's the difference between law and grace. We can't transplant our own hearts. God does it.

Notice what God promises. Not just forgiveness for the past, although cleansing is part of it. Not just new rules, although walking in His ways is part of it. He promises a heart transplant. And He promises to put His own Spirit inside His people, so they'll have the desire and power to follow Him.

This was the same hope Jeremiah had described as the New Covenant, when God would write His law on people's hearts. Ezekiel adds that God's Spirit would live within them.

> **REAL TALK** **When You Can't Change Yourself**
>
> Maybe you've tried hard to change something about yourself: a habit, an attitude, a way of treating people. You made promises. You set goals. And you kept slipping back. That can feel discouraging. Ezekiel 36 says real change starts with God giving you a new heart and His Spirit. That doesn't mean you do nothing. It means you depend on Him instead of only your willpower. Ask God for help every day. Find people who will encourage you and hold you accountable. And if you're struggling with something like addiction, self-harm, or an eating disorder, please talk to a trusted adult and get professional help. God often works through doctors, counselors, and friends.

Then, in chapter 37, Ezekiel had his most famous vision. "The LORD's hand was on me, and he brought me out in the LORD's Spirit, and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones."

It was like an old battlefield. Bones everywhere. Very many, and very dry. No flesh, no life, nothing left. Then God asked a question. "Son of man, can these bones live?"

What would you say? Obviously not. Dead is dead. But Ezekiel gave a wise answer. "Lord GOD, you know."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Breath, Wind, and Spirit**

In Ezekiel 37, the Hebrew word ruach appears again and again. It can mean breath, wind, or spirit, depending on the context. Ezekiel uses all three meanings in the same passage. The bones need breath to live. The breath comes from the four winds. And God says, "I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live." It's a play on words that ties together the breath of life God gave Adam in Genesis, the wind of God, and the Holy Spirit. Life comes from God's breath.

Then God told Ezekiel to preach to the bones. That sounds ridiculous. But Ezekiel obeyed. "You dry bones, hear the LORD's word." And as he spoke, there was a rattling noise. The bones came together, bone to bone. Then tendons appeared, then muscles, then skin. But there was still no breath in them. They were bodies, but they weren't alive.

So God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath. "Come from the four winds, breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." And Ezekiel writes, "the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly great army."

REAL TALK **When You Feel Dead Inside**

Sometimes people describe depression as feeling dead inside, like their bones are dry and hope is gone. That's exactly how the exiles described themselves. If you feel that way, please know you're not alone and you're not beyond hope. God breathed life into a valley full of dry bones. But please don't just wait it out alone. Talk to a parent, school counselor, pastor, or doctor about how you're feeling. Depression is real and treatable, and asking for help is a brave and wise thing to do. If you're having thoughts of hurting yourself or ending your life, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night. If you're in immediate danger, call 911.

God explained the vision. "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel." The nation felt dead. But God would open their

graves and bring them back to their land. “I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live.”

Many Jewish and Christian readers see in this passage not only the return from exile but also a glimpse of something even bigger: God’s power to raise the dead. Later prophets and New Testament writers talk about a future resurrection, when God will raise His people bodily from the grave. The valley of dry bones is one of the earliest and most vivid pictures of that hope.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Dem Bones**

The vision of the dry bones inspired a famous African American spiritual, often called Dem Bones or Dry Bones, which became popular in the early twentieth century. You might have heard its lines about the toe bone connected to the foot bone. It’s easy to treat it as a silly children’s song, but it grew out of a community that knew suffering and longed for freedom. For enslaved people and their descendants, Ezekiel’s vision was a powerful promise that God could bring life and liberation to people the world had treated as dead.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Two Sticks**

After the vision, God gave Ezekiel another sign act. He took two sticks. On one he wrote the name of Judah, the southern kingdom. On the other he wrote the name of Joseph, or Ephraim, representing the northern kingdom of Israel. Then he held them together so they looked like one stick in his hand. Israel had been split into two kingdoms for over three hundred years, since the days of Solomon’s son Rehoboam. The northern kingdom had been destroyed by Assyria over a century before. But God promised, “They will no longer be two nations. They won’t be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.”

Then God promised that David, His servant, would be king over them, and they would have one shepherd. He promised an everlasting covenant of peace. And He promised, “My tent also will be with them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

From dry bones to living people. From two broken kingdoms to one united family. From exile to God living among them. That's the kind of hope only God can give.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Born of Water and Spirit**

Centuries later, a respected Jewish teacher named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Jesus told him, "unless one is born of water and Spirit, he can't enter into God's Kingdom." Nicodemus was confused. But Jesus seemed surprised that a teacher of Israel didn't understand. Many scholars think Jesus was pointing to Ezekiel 36, where God promised to sprinkle clean water on His people and put His Spirit within them. Being born again is the new heart Ezekiel promised.

Notice how Ezekiel's vision works. The bones came together because Ezekiel spoke God's word. But the bones didn't live until the breath came. There are two stages. Some people look good on the outside. They know the right answers, go to church, and follow the rules. But they don't have God's life inside them. Bodies without breath. What they need isn't just better structure, but God's Spirit.

REAL TALK **Speak Life**

God told Ezekiel to speak to dead bones. That sounds pointless, but God used Ezekiel's words to bring life. You can't breathe life into anyone the way God does. But your words matter more than you think. Proverbs says death and life are in the power of the tongue. A word of encouragement, a prayer, a reminder of God's love, or a simple I'm here for you might be exactly what a friend with dry bones needs. Don't underestimate what God can do through the words you speak.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jesus and the Dead**

Jesus didn't just teach about resurrection. He demonstrated it. He raised a widow's son during a funeral procession, a synagogue leader's daughter from her bed, and His friend Lazarus from a tomb after four days. And then He Himself rose from the dead on the third day. Christians see the valley of dry

bones as a promise that Jesus fulfills, both in giving new spiritual life now and in the future bodily resurrection of all who belong to Him.

God ended the vision with a promise and a signature: "you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it." There's that refrain again. When the bones live, everyone will know who did it. Not the prophet. Not the people. God.

REAL TALK **Signs of a Softer Heart**

How can you tell if God is softening your heart? You might notice that you care more about people who are hurting. You feel sorry when you've done wrong, instead of just being sorry you got caught. You want to pray, even a little. You find yourself forgiving someone you used to hold a grudge against. You're more honest. A heart of flesh isn't a perfect heart. It's a heart that's alive to God and to other people. If you see even small signs like these, thank God. He's at work.

The promise of a new heart also explains why the gospel is good news and not just good advice. Good advice says, Try harder. Good news says, God has done something for you that you could never do for yourself. Ezekiel's promise is that God Himself would clean, renew, and fill His people. Christians believe that promise was opened to the whole world when Jesus died and rose again and poured out His Spirit at Pentecost.

KEY VERSE

I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:26 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why is it good news that God acts for the sake of His name?
2. What's the difference between trying to change yourself and asking God for a new heart?
3. Why do you think Ezekiel answered, Lord GOD, you know?
4. What part of your life feels like dry bones right now?

TRY THIS *Read Ezekiel 37:1-14 out loud. Then pray for one area of your life, or someone else's, that feels dead, asking God to breathe new life into it.*

CHAPTER 6

Gog and Magog in Context

Ezekiel 38–39

Chapters 38 and 39 are some of the most debated chapters in Ezekiel. They describe a massive army from the far north, led by a figure named Gog, from the land of Magog, attacking God's people in the latter days. People have argued about these chapters for centuries, and some have tried to match them to the news headlines of their own time.

Let's look at what the text actually says, then lay out the main ways Christians have understood it.

God tells Ezekiel, "Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him." Gog gathers a huge alliance of nations, including Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, and Beth Togarmah. They come against Israel at a time when the people have been regathered from the nations and are living securely in "the land of unwalled villages," with no defenses.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Who Are Gog and Magog?**

No one knows for sure who Gog was. Some ancient scholars connected him with a king named Gyges of Lydia, in what is now Turkey. Magog appears in Genesis 10 as one of the sons of Japheth, so it probably refers to a people group in the far north. Meshech and Tubal were regions in Anatolia, also modern Turkey. The word Rosh can be translated as the name of a place, as

the WEB does, or as the word chief, as many translations do, so that Gog is the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Some popular writers have linked Rosh to Russia and Meshech to Moscow, but most scholars think those connections are based on sound-alike words, not on the Hebrew. The nations listed come from all directions, showing a gathering of the whole world's hostile powers.

The attack seems unstoppable. But God steps in. There's an earthquake. The attackers turn on each other. God sends disease, hailstones, fire, and sulfur. The great army collapses. The people of Israel spend seven years burning the enemy's weapons as firewood, and seven months burying the dead to cleanse the land. Birds and animals are invited to a great feast.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Fair Questions: How Do Christians Read Gog and Magog?**

Christians have understood these chapters in several main ways. Some read them as a prediction of a specific future battle in the last days, before or during the end of the age, involving the modern nation of Israel and an alliance of nations from the north. Some of those readers connect it with particular events or nations, though they often disagree about which ones. Others see Gog as a symbol of all the forces of evil that oppose God's people throughout history, with the battle representing God's final victory, rather than a specific military event. Others see these chapters as fulfilled partly in past events and pointing forward to the final defeat of evil described in Revelation 20, where Gog and Magog appear as the nations Satan gathers for a last rebellion. Some combine these views. Sincere, Bible-loving Christians hold each of these views. This book doesn't endorse one timeline. What they all agree on is that God wins.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Latter Days**

Ezekiel says Gog's attack would happen "in the latter days" and "after many days." In the Old Testament, the latter days often means the time when God finally fulfills His promises, but it doesn't always mean the very end of history. The prophets sometimes saw future events like mountain peaks, one behind

another, without showing the valleys of time in between. That's part of why Christians interpret prophecies like these in different ways. What's clear is that Ezekiel 38-39 looks beyond the immediate return from exile to a future time when God's people would be regathered and secure.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Apocalyptic Language**

Ezekiel 38-39 uses apocalyptic language, a style of writing found in parts of Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation. Apocalyptic writing uses vivid symbols, huge numbers, cosmic events, and dramatic battles to reveal spiritual realities and God's ultimate victory. It's not meant to be read like a newspaper report, and it's not meant to be decoded like a puzzle that tells you exactly what will happen next year. Its main purpose is to give hope to people who are suffering, showing them that God is in control and evil will not win.

So what's the point of these chapters? Ezekiel tells us directly. God says, "I will magnify myself and sanctify myself, and I will make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

There's that refrain again. The battle isn't really about geography or politics. It's about God showing who He is. The whole world will see that the God of Israel is holy, powerful, and faithful. And His people will finally be safe.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Seven Years and Seven Months**

Ezekiel says the people would burn the enemy's weapons for seven years and bury the dead for seven months. In the Bible, the number seven often represents completeness. Some readers take these numbers literally. Others see them as symbols showing that the victory would be total and the land completely cleansed. Either way, the picture is striking: the weapons of war become firewood for ordinary life. It echoes Isaiah's famous promise that people will beat their swords into plowshares. God's victory turns instruments of death into fuel for warming homes and cooking meals.

REAL TALK **Fear and the End Times**

Sometimes people talk about the end of the world in ways that make you scared. Maybe you've seen videos claiming that a certain war or world leader fulfills Bible prophecy, or heard people predict specific dates. Over the centuries, many confident predictions about Gog and Magog have turned out to be wrong. Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour, and He told His followers not to be alarmed. The purpose of prophecy isn't to make you anxious. It's to give you hope that evil won't have the last word. If thinking about the end times makes you afraid, talk to a parent, pastor, or youth leader. Focus on what's clear: God is in control, Jesus is coming back, and He will make everything right.

The section ends with one of the most comforting promises in the book. God says His people will know that He sent them into exile and also brought them back, and He will not leave any of them behind. "I won't hide my face from them any more, for I have poured out my Spirit on the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD."

Notice how chapters 38-39 fit into the flow of Ezekiel. Chapters 36-37 promise new hearts, new life, and God living among His people. Chapters 38-39 show that even the greatest future threat can't undo that promise. And chapters 40-48 will show what life with God at the center looks like. The battle is not the end of the story. God's presence is.

REAL TALK **Christians Under Pressure**

In many countries today, Christians face serious danger for their faith. Some are arrested, attacked, or forced to leave their homes. For believers in those places, prophecies like Ezekiel 38-39 aren't just theories about the future. They're a lifeline of hope that God sees them and will one day defend His people completely. You can pray for persecuted believers by name, learn about their stories, and remember that the global church is your family. When

you face smaller pressures, like being mocked for your faith, remember that you're part of a long line of people who have trusted God in hard places.

REAL TALK **When Evil Seems Huge**

Ezekiel 38-39 describes an evil that seems unstoppable, coming from every direction. Sometimes the world can feel that way: wars, injustice, violence, and problems too big for anyone to fix. Sometimes your own life can feel that way too. These chapters don't pretend evil is small. But they insist that God is bigger. He doesn't win by a narrow margin. He wins completely. That gives you courage to keep doing good, even when it feels like the bad guys are winning.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Gog and Magog in Revelation**

Revelation 20 describes Satan being released at the end of a thousand-year period, and says he "will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war." In Revelation, Gog and Magog aren't a specific country. They're the nations from the four corners of the earth, a picture of all the world's rebellion against God. Fire comes down from heaven and ends the battle instantly. Whatever view Christians take on Ezekiel 38-39, Revelation uses Gog and Magog as a symbol of the final defeat of evil.

These chapters also echo themes from the rest of Ezekiel. God says, "I will make my holy name known among my people Israel. I won't allow my holy name to be profaned any more." Back in chapter 36, God said His people had profaned His name among the nations. Now the nations will see His holiness. And God says, "Now I will reverse the captivity of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel." The point of the battle isn't destruction for its own sake. It's the final protection of a people God has made new.

REAL TALK **Don't Believe Everything You See Online**

Social media is full of videos that claim to have decoded prophecy, often with dramatic music and confident voices. Some say a war, earthquake, or world

leader proves the end is days away. Before you believe or share something like that, ask a few questions. Does this match what the Bible actually says, in context? What do trusted pastors and scholars say? Is the goal to make me afraid or to point me to Jesus? Has this person made predictions that didn't come true before? Wise people test what they hear. Paul praised the Bereans for checking the Scriptures to see if what they were taught was true.

REAL TALK **Reading Hard Prophecy Well**

When you come to a confusing passage like Ezekiel 38-39, here are a few tips. First, read the whole passage, not just one verse. Second, ask what it meant to the first people who heard it, exiles who had lost everything. Third, look for how the rest of the Bible, especially the New Testament, uses the same ideas. Fourth, hold your conclusions humbly, especially where faithful Christians disagree. And fifth, focus on what is clear. In these chapters, what's clear is that God protects His people, defeats evil, and makes Himself known. You don't need to have every detail figured out to trust the God who wins.

Think about how these chapters must have sounded to Ezekiel's first listeners. They were a small, defeated people living as refugees in the capital of the world's greatest empire. They had no army, no king, no temple, and no land. To them, the nations of the world must have seemed overwhelming. Ezekiel's vision told them that even if every nation on earth came against them, God would still protect them. That's a message for anyone who feels small in a big, scary world.

KEY VERSE

I will magnify myself and sanctify myself, and I will make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

Ezekiel 38:23 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think people have tried so often to connect Gog and Magog to current events?
2. What do all the different views of these chapters agree on?
3. How does the refrain Then they will know that I am the LORD shape the meaning of these chapters?
4. How can thinking about God's final victory give you courage instead of fear?

TRY THIS *Read Revelation 21:1-5 this week. Write down three things God promises to do when He finally defeats evil.*

CHAPTER 7

The River of Life and The LORD Is There

Ezekiel 40–48

Twenty-five years after Ezekiel was taken into exile, and fourteen years after Jerusalem fell, God gave him one last great vision. He was taken to a very high mountain in the land of Israel. A man who looked like bronze, holding a measuring rod and a linen cord, gave him a guided tour of a new temple.

Chapters 40-48 are full of measurements: gates, walls, courtyards, rooms, altars, and doorways. It can feel like reading a blueprint. But the details had a purpose. The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed. The exiles might have wondered whether God would ever live among them again. This vision said yes, and it showed a place where everything was in perfect order, holy and whole.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Second Temple**

When some of the exiles returned to Jerusalem around 538 BC, they rebuilt the temple, finishing it in 516 BC. That Second Temple was much smaller and plainer than Solomon's had been. The book of Ezra says older people who remembered the first temple wept when they saw the foundation. And there's no record that God's glory filled the Second Temple in the visible way it had filled Solomon's temple. Many readers saw that as a sign that Ezekiel's vision hadn't been fully fulfilled yet. They kept waiting for the day when God's glory

would return. Christians believe it returned in a surprising way, when Jesus, God in the flesh, walked into that temple.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Fair Questions: A Literal or Symbolic Temple?**

Christians and Jews have understood Ezekiel's temple in different ways. Some Jewish readers see it as a blueprint for a future third temple to be built in the messianic age. Some Christians also read it literally, as a temple that will exist during a future thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. Other Christians read it as symbolic, picturing God's perfect presence with His people, fulfilled in Jesus, who called His body a temple, in the church, which the New Testament calls God's temple, and finally in the new creation, where John saw no temple, because "the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." Some note that the returning exiles did not try to build Ezekiel's temple exactly, which suggests they saw it as more than a construction plan. Sincere Christians hold each of these views. All agree it points to God dwelling with His people.

Then came the most important moment of the tour. Ezekiel saw the glory of God returning. Years earlier, in chapters 10 and 11, he had watched it leave the temple and go east. Now he watched it come back from the east. "His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth was illuminated with his glory." "The LORD's glory came into the house by the way of the gate which faces toward the east." And "the LORD's glory filled the house."

God said, "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell among the children of Israel forever."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Faithful Priests**

In Ezekiel 44, God gives special honor to the priests descended from Zadok, because they "performed the duty of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray." Zadok had been the faithful high priest in the days of David and Solomon. While other priests and Levites joined in idolatry, his family stayed

faithful. In Ezekiel's vision, faithfulness is remembered. That would have meant a lot to Ezekiel, who was a priest himself and who had watched so many leaders fail.

Why all the measurements? God told Ezekiel, "show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern." The perfect design of the temple would show the people how far they had fallen, and also how carefully God planned for their future. Every wall and gate said that God takes holiness seriously, and that He had not given up on living among His people.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Shut Gate**

In Ezekiel 44, God says the east gate, through which His glory entered, must remain shut, because the LORD had come in through it. Today, the Golden Gate in the eastern wall of Jerusalem's Old City has been sealed for centuries. It was sealed by Muslim rulers long ago, and many people connect it with Ezekiel's vision and with traditions about the Messiah entering Jerusalem. Christians, Jews, and Muslims all have traditions related to this gate. The present gate isn't the same gate Ezekiel saw, but it has become a powerful symbol of hope.

Then, in chapter 47, the man brought Ezekiel back to the entrance of the temple. And Ezekiel saw water trickling out from under the threshold, flowing east.

The man measured a thousand cubits, about a third of a mile, and led Ezekiel through the water. It was ankle deep. Another thousand cubits, and it was knee deep. Another thousand, and it was waist deep. Another thousand, and "it was a river that I could not pass through, for the waters had risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be walked through."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Dead Sea**

The river in Ezekiel's vision flows east into the Arabah, the deep valley around the Jordan River, and into the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is about ten times saltier than the ocean, one of the saltiest bodies of water on earth. Nothing much can live in it except a few tiny microbes. That's why it's called dead. In Ezekiel's vision, the river flows into the Dead Sea and makes its waters fresh. Fish fill it, like the fish of the Mediterranean. Fishermen spread their nets along the shore from En Gedi to En Eglaim. The deadest place in the land becomes full of life.

The guide explained, "These waters flow out toward the eastern region and will go down into the Arabah. Then they will go toward the sea and flow into the sea which will be made to flow out; and the waters will be healed." And then: "everything will live wherever the river comes."

Along the banks, trees grow that never lose their leaves and produce fruit every month. "Its fruit will be for food, and its leaf for healing."

Notice how the river gets deeper the farther it goes. It starts as a trickle. It ends as a flood. That's what God's life is like. It starts small, but it keeps growing, and it brings healing wherever it reaches.

REAL TALK **Ankle Deep or All In?**

In Ezekiel 47, the river starts ankle deep and grows until Ezekiel can't touch the bottom. Many people treat faith like wading at the edge. They stay where they can still touch the ground, where they feel in control. But the river keeps calling you deeper, into trust, surrender, and real life with God. What would it look like for you to go a little deeper this year? Maybe reading the Bible regularly, praying honestly, joining a small group, or serving people in need. You don't have to jump into the deep end all at once. But don't stay ankle deep forever.

Interestingly, God also says the swamps and marshes would not be healed, but would be left for salt. Even salt had a purpose in the ancient world, for preserving food and seasoning. The vision is realistic about the world, but full of hope.

The final chapter divides the land among the twelve tribes, including generous space for foreigners who lived among them, a detail that goes back to chapter 47. And then the book of Ezekiel ends with the name of the city.

Not Jerusalem. Not Zion. A new name.

"The LORD is there."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Name of the City**

In Hebrew, the name in Ezekiel 48:35 is just two words: God's personal name, which the WEB prints as LORD, followed by shammah, which means there. It's the perfect ending for Ezekiel. The book began with a priest in exile, far from the temple, seeing God's glory in a foreign land. It continued with the glory leaving Jerusalem. And it ends with God returning to live among His people forever. The greatest gift isn't the temple, the land, or the river. It's God Himself, present with His people.

Ezekiel had spent his whole ministry far from home, surrounded by rebellion, grief, and loss. He had lost his wife. He had watched his nation fall. But his final vision was of a city where God would never leave again. Whatever you're facing, that's where the story is going too.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Rivers From Eden to Revelation**

The river in Ezekiel 47 connects to a bigger story. In Genesis, a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and the tree of life grew there. A psalm sings, "There is a river, the streams of which make the city of God glad." In Zechariah, living waters flow out from Jerusalem. And at the very end of the Bible, John sees "a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the

throne of God and of the Lamb," with the tree of life on both sides, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. The Bible begins and ends with a river and a tree. Ezekiel's vision sits right in the middle, pointing forward to the day when everything is made new.

Here's another surprising detail. When God divided the land among the tribes, He told Israel to give an inheritance "to the aliens who live among you." The foreigners who had settled among Israel would receive land just like the native-born. In God's new city, outsiders become family. That echoes the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him, and it points forward to Jesus, who has "other sheep" and promised that they would become one flock with one shepherd.

REAL TALK **You Can Be Part of the River**

In Ezekiel's vision, the river brings life wherever it goes, and the trees along its banks give food and healing. Jesus said that whoever believes in Him would have rivers of living water flowing from within them. That means God doesn't just want to heal you. He wants His life to flow through you to other people. When you include someone who's left out, stand up for someone being bullied, listen to a hurting friend, or serve people in need, you're part of the river. God's healing reaches the world through ordinary people like you.

REAL TALK **Where Is God Right Now?**

Ezekiel's final vision is about a future city where God lives with His people forever. But you don't have to wait for that day to experience God's presence. Jesus promised His followers, I am with you always. The Holy Spirit lives within everyone who trusts in Jesus. That means the LORD is there: in your bedroom when you can't sleep, in the hallway at school, in the hospital waiting room, in the car on the way to a hard conversation. You might not see His glory like Ezekiel did. But He's there. Try praying a simple prayer at different moments of the day: God, You're here. Help me notice You.

KEY VERSE

and the name of the city from that day shall be, 'The LORD is there.'

Ezekiel 48:35 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the return of God's glory was so important to Ezekiel?
2. What does the river healing the Dead Sea say about what God can do?
3. Are you ankle deep, knee deep, or swimming in your relationship with God?
4. Why is The LORD is there such a powerful name for a city?

TRY THIS *Draw or describe the river in Ezekiel 47 as it gets deeper. Then write down one step you can take this week to go deeper with God.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Ezekiel ends with a promise: a new temple, a healing river, and a city named The LORD is there. Jewish readers treasure these promises of restoration and God's presence. Christians believe they come to their fullest meaning in Jesus.

Ezekiel saw God fire the selfish shepherds and promise to shepherd His sheep Himself. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Ezekiel saw water flowing from the temple, bringing life wherever it went. Jesus stood up at a festival and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink!" And John's vision at the end of the Bible shows "a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," with the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Ezekiel heard God promise to put His Spirit within His people and give them a new heart. After rising from the dead, Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit!" just as the breath entered the dry bones. And Ezekiel watched the glory of God leave the temple and promised it would return. John writes, "The Word became flesh and lived among us. We saw his glory." Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. In Him, the LORD is there.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He is the Shepherd who comes looking for His lost sheep.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Ezekiel says our hearts can turn hard as stone. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd Ezekiel promised. He laid down His life for the sheep, died for our sins, and rose again, so dry bones can live.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

A new heart is God's gift, not our achievement. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Turn and live.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words, and you don't need to clean yourself up first. God is the one who gives the new heart. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

God, my heart has been hard, and I've gone my own way. I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for me and rose again. Forgive me. Take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh. Put Your Spirit within me, and breathe life into every part of me that feels dead. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Ezekiel 36-37, then John 10, from dry bones to the Good Shepherd.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized. Sheep do better in a flock.

Ask for the Spirit's help. Each day, ask God to soften your heart and lead you.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Ezekiel's visions are strange, and his questions are big. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Ezekiel is right, God can make dry bones live. And no heart is too hard for Him to make new.

I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live.

Ezekiel 37:14 (WEB)