

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Complete Leader Guide

Sixteen sessions of 75 to 90 minutes, for young adult groups

An inductive Catholic Bible study

Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition

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Take-Home sheets are separate two-page handouts, one per session, given out at the end of each night. They are supplied as individual files and as a single merged Take-Home run, and they are not part of this guide.

Using This Guide

Ezekiel is the book of a God who will not stay where he is put. It opens with the glory of the LORD appearing in Babylon, hundreds of miles from the temple, and it ends with a city whose name is its last word: *The LORD is there*. Everything between those two points is the argument. This study walks a group through that argument in sixteen sessions, and it is built so that the group reaches the conclusions themselves rather than receiving them from you.

The method

Every session follows the inductive Win, Build, Send pattern. **Win** questions are open and personal, with no wrong answers; they warm the room and quietly load the night theme. **Build** is the inductive core: numbered questions that send the group back into the text to observe, interpret and conclude. **Send** questions turn the discovery outward into the week ahead. Your job in Build is to ask, wait, and let the silence work. The group finding one thing for itself is worth more than five things you tell them.

What is in each session

Each session document has three parts.

Part One. Leader Preparation Guide

Read this earlier in the week, not in the car. It carries the Session Overview (the Discovery Aim, which is what the group should conclude for themselves, and the Catholic Touchstone), What You Need to Know for background, Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment, three Voices of the Church, a Catechism Connection, the Thread Watch, a leader-only Objection Bench, numbered Session Goals, and a Time Note with the cuts already chosen for you.

Part Two. Discussion Guide

This is what you hold during the session: opening prayer, the Win questions, the reading plan, the numbered Build questions each followed by a shaded ANSWER box, the live discovery moments, the steelman exchanges, Dig Deeper boxes, the Send questions, Live It This Week, the Scripture memory verse, and the closing prayer.

Part Three. Leader Reference Card

Every passage used that night, in order, with the discovery passages flagged so you do not read them out early. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

The boxes, and what to do with them

- **ANSWER (share after the discussion).** These are for you, and the label means what it says. Let the group work first. Then fill in what they missed, correct what needs correcting, and move on.
- **Live discovery.** At these moments the group opens the cross-references themselves, usually in teams, and reports back. Do not name the passages in advance and do not let anyone read ahead; the whole point is that they find it.
- **Steelman exchange.** The opposing reading is put at its full strength first, in its own voice, before anything answers it. Read it that way. A weak version of an objection teaches your group nothing except that you are afraid of it.

- **Objection Bench.** Leader only. Do not raise these. They are there for the night someone else does.
- **Dig Deeper.** Optional. First thing to cut when the clock is against you.
- **Voices of the Church.** Three per session, from the Fathers, Doctors and saints, each with a short line telling you where it lands for the group.

Threads, and the sealed guess

Several questions run underneath the whole study and are tracked in the Thread Watch box of each Leader Preparation Guide, marked *plant*, *develop* or *resolve*. Follow those notes closely. Most of the study's payoff depends on things staying unsaid until the session that pays them off, and the Thread Watch will tell you plainly when to hold your tongue.

The sealed guess

At the end of Session 1 each participant is asked to write one sentence on the Take-Home sheet, answering this question:

by the end of this book, where do you think God will choose to dwell?

They fold or seal the sheet, bring it back the following week, and you keep the guesses unopened. Do not discuss them, do not speculate aloud, and do not let the group turn it into a debate. The envelope is opened in Session 12, at the question marked in the Discussion Guide, and every guess is read.

Take-Home sheets

Each session has a two-page Take-Home sheet. It is given out **after** the session, never before. It carries a What We Found recap, that night's three Voices of the Church, the full Live It This Week practices, the memory verse, the reading for next time, and the Catechism references. Take-Home 1 also carries the sealed My Guess box. The sheets contain no ANSWER content, no discovery passages named in advance, no Thread Watch and no steelman material, so a participant reading ahead cannot spoil anything for the group.

Practical setup

- Scripture throughout is the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition. Ask everyone to bring a Bible; the live discovery moments need real pages to turn.
- Bring an envelope to Session 2 for the sealed guesses, and keep it somewhere you will not lose it for nine weeks.
- Ezekiel is long. Every session names exactly what is read aloud and what is only surveyed; stay inside those boundaries or the clock will beat you.
- The Time Note in each Leader Preparation Guide already ranks the cuts. Decide before the session which ones you are taking.

A note on the sources

Citations in this guide are handled at three levels. A quotation given as the author's words is printed as such with its locus. A passage that reproduces a Father's or a saint's teaching in condensed form is labelled in the box itself as a summary rather than a quotation. Where a source could not be verified with confidence it was left out. Modern images and analogies supplied by this guide are marked as ours, not the saint's and not Scripture's. Where the Church has not defined a question, the guide says so and

holds the reading loosely instead of overclaiming; you will see that most often around the temple vision of chapters 40 to 48.

This study is one of the Catholic Armory inductive studies. It is written for a leader who is one week ahead of the group, not for an expert, and everything you need for a session is inside the session.

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 1. The Throne on Wheels

Reading: Ezekiel 1

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that God's glory appears to Ezekiel in Babylon, not Jerusalem, and concludes for themselves that God is not confined to his temple or defeated by exile.

Catholic Touchstone

God's transcendence and his real presence to his people everywhere: he is greater than all his works and closer to us than we are to ourselves, and no place is outside his reach.

This is the doorway to the whole study. A young priest who should be starting temple service in Jerusalem is instead sitting by an irrigation canal in enemy territory, and the heavens open there. The vision itself, storm, creatures, wheels, throne, glory, is strange on purpose: it is answering the question every exile was asking, which is whether their God had been beaten. Your job tonight is not to decode every wing and wheel. It is to let the group feel the shock of the address line: Babylon. If they walk out having concluded for themselves that God's throne has wheels and that he arrives where his people are, session 1 has done its work. Resist the urge to explain the vision before they have wrestled with it; the confusion is part of the text's design, and Ezekiel himself is flattened by it before the chapter ends.

What You Need to Know

Who Ezekiel is and when this happens

Ezekiel is a priest, the son of Buzi, deported to Babylonia in 597 BC along with King Jehoiachin and thousands of Judah's leading citizens (the deportation described in 2 Kings 24:10-16, which does not name him; his presence in it is the standard inference from Ezekiel 1:1-3 read alongside it). The vision is dated to the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile, which works out to 593 BC by the standard reckoning. The 'thirtieth year' of 1:1 is most often taken as Ezekiel's own age, which would be poignant, since thirty is the age Numbers 4:3 sets for Kohathite Levitical service at the tent of meeting, which many interpreters take as the background here; but the text does not say so explicitly, and interpreters have debated it since antiquity. Hold that reading lightly and offer it as likely rather than certain.

The one date that changes everything

Fix this in your mind before the session: in 593 BC the temple in Jerusalem is still standing. It will not be destroyed until 586 BC, seven years after tonight's vision. Ezekiel is not writing consolation after a catastrophe; he is receiving a vision before one, and much of his early ministry will be spent telling his fellow exiles the disaster they refuse to believe is coming. This single fact is your strongest card in tonight's steelman exchange, so do not spend it early.

What exile did to their theology

In the ancient Near East, gods were widely assumed to be territorial. A nation's defeat implied its god's defeat; a destroyed or captured temple meant a humiliated deity. The exiles by the Chebar are living

inside that logic. Their king is a prisoner, their elites are resettled on Babylonian canals, and Babylon's own temples and processional ways proclaim the triumph of Babylon's gods. Psalm 137 gives you the emotional register: how shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? Ezekiel 1 is God's answer, delivered in person.

The setting and the imagery

The 'river Chebar' is best understood as an irrigation canal in the Nippur region of Babylonia, near the settlement of Tel-abib where the exiles lived (3:15). Note too that Babylon was full of winged composite guardian creatures in its art and architecture, human faces on animal bodies with wings. Ezekiel's vision speaks that visual language and then overrules it: the creatures the exiles see carved on their conquerors' monuments turn out to be, in truth, servants carrying the throne of the God of Israel. The vision plants his flag in their front yard.

- The vision moves upward in layers: storm, four living creatures, wheels, a firmament like crystal, a throne like sapphire, and above it 'a likeness as it were of a human form' wrapped in fire and brightness.
- Ezekiel's language gets more hedged the higher he looks. By 1:28 he is at three removes: 'the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.' The grammar is breaking under the weight of what he sees, and that is reverence, not bad prose.
- Later Jewish tradition called this the *merkabah*, the chariot vision, and treated it as almost too holy to expound. Your group is in venerable company if they find it overwhelming.
- A quick handle you can use if the room needs one: this is a throne with all-wheel drive. That image is ours, not Scripture's, so present it as a modern gloss.

How the chapter ends, and where it stops

Chapter 1 ends with Ezekiel on his face and a voice beginning to speak (1:28). That is deliberately mid-sentence: the vision is the setup, and the commission that follows is next week. Tonight, stop where the chapter stops. Do not read ahead into chapter 2, and if a participant has read ahead, ask them to hold what they found.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Sinai in Babylon

The vision is saturated with Sinai. Storm, cloud, fire, and brightness recall Exodus 19; and at Sinai the elders of Israel 'saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone' (Exodus 24:10). Ezekiel sees a throne 'in appearance like sapphire' (1:26). The point is quietly devastating for temple-only theology: God's most foundational self-revelation happened in a wilderness, outside any building, to a people between homes. He has done this before.

The glory that filled the tent and the temple

The 'glory of the LORD,' Hebrew *kabod*, is the visible weight of God's presence that filled the tabernacle at Exodus 40:34-35 and the temple at its dedication in 1 Kings 8:10-11. When Ezekiel says he saw 'the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD' (1:28), he is using precise priestly vocabulary: this is that same presence, and it is in Babylonia. Track this word through the whole study; where the glory goes is the plot of the book.

Fulfillment: the throne, the opened heavens, and the human form

Three lines run forward from tonight. First, Revelation 4 shows the same throne and the same four living creatures in heaven, worshiping without interruption; the throne Ezekiel glimpsed is the throne that never stopped standing. Second, the New Testament loves the phrase 'the heavens were opened': at the Lord's baptism, and on the lips of the martyr Stephen, who sees the glory of God while standing on trial before the council (Acts 7:55-56). Third, and most carefully: at the very top of the vision Ezekiel sees 'a likeness as it were of a human form' (1:26) on the throne. The Church, reading backward from the Incarnation, has long seen here a shadowed hint that God's glory would one day show a human face (John 1:14). Present that as the Church's retrospective reading, which is how typology works, not as something Ezekiel consciously predicted.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Gregory the Great, d. 604

Gregory, preaching through this very chapter, teaches that the wheel within a wheel is the New Testament turning inside the Old: one revelation, moving together, so that the two advance as one. And he teaches that the divine words grow with the one who reads them; the same page gives milk to a beginner and fire to a saint. For Gregory the chariot is a picture of how God's word travels: alive, watchful, going wherever the Spirit goes, and never stuck.

Homilies on Ezekiel, Book 1. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone intimidated by how strange tonight's chapter is: this text has fed popes and beginners alike, and it meets each reader at their own depth.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, d. c. 202

Irenaeus argues that the Gospel is rightly fourfold, and he finds its image in the four faces of the living creatures around God's throne: the lion speaking of royal power, the ox of priestly sacrifice, the man of Christ's coming in our flesh, the eagle of the Spirit hovering over the Church. The creatures that carry the throne end up, in Irenaeus's reading, carrying the good news of the one who sits on it.

Against Heresies 3.11.8. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. The four faces your group just puzzled over have been read for eighteen centuries as a portrait of the four Gospels; the strangeness is not empty.

St. John Chrysostom, d. 407

On the eve of his banishment from Constantinople, Chrysostom told his people, in substance, that he feared nothing that could be done to him, because the Church does not consist in walls and roof but in faith and life. The storm was raging, he said, yet he stood upon the rock; the waves might rise, but they could not sink the ship of Jesus, and no sentence of any emperor could separate him from God.

Homily traditionally titled 'Before His Exile'. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone in the room who feels far from the place where their faith once made sense: the place changed; God did not.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 300. God transcends the world and is greater than all his works, and yet he is present to his creatures in their inmost being. Tonight's vision holds both truths at once: the throne is above the firmament, and it is parked in Babylon.

CCC 42. God transcends every creature, so our language about him must be purified of everything image-bound and imperfect. This is why Ezekiel stacks qualifiers: 'likeness,' 'appearance,' 'as it were.'

CCC 1137. The Church's liturgy participates in the heavenly liturgy that John sees in Revelation, centered on a throne standing in heaven and the one seated on it. The connection back to Ezekiel's throne runs through Revelation 4, which reworks his vision; that link is the tradition's reading, and the paragraph itself is about the heavenly liturgy.

CCC 104. In Sacred Scripture the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength; in the sacred books the Father meets his children and speaks with them. Ezekiel eating the scroll (2:8-3:3) is our image for what this paragraph describes.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Follow the glory (plant). Make sure the phrase 'the glory of the LORD' (1:28) gets said aloud and noticed tonight. Tell the group only this: watch where the glory is, every session. Do not hint that it moves. Where the glory goes is the plot of the book, and they must not see chapters 10 and 43 coming.

The LORD is there (plant). Tonight's driving question, where does God dwell, is secretly the book's question, and its answer is the study's title, drawn from the book's final sentence. Reveal nothing. Just make sure the question itself is left standing, open and unresolved, when they walk out.

Sealed guess (plant). The Take-Home sheet carries the My Guess box. Explain the mechanics at the end of the night: they write one sentence at home, fold the sheet or seal it in an envelope, and bring it back next week for you to keep unopened. The guesses are opened at session 12. Do not discuss anyone's guess or speculate aloud yourself.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

This vision is just incomprehensible weirdness. Why would God communicate in a way nobody can decode?

The overload is the message. Ezekiel is not given a diagram; he is given an experience that exceeds every category he has, and his breaking grammar ('the appearance of the likeness of') is the honest residue of that. A God who fit neatly inside a priest's existing categories would be a God small enough to be trapped in a building, which is exactly the theology this vision is demolishing. Note also that Ezekiel understands the part that matters: he knows he has seen the glory of the LORD, and he falls on his face.

If God let his temple be threatened and his people deported, hasn't he broken his promises to David and to Zion?

Hold this one loosely tonight because the book itself answers it slowly. The short version: the covenant always contained exile as its stated consequence (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28), so exile is the covenant being kept, not broken, in its judgment clauses; and the vision itself shows the promise-keeping God arriving among the deportees

rather than abandoning them. The full answer runs through 'my servant David' in chapter 34 and the new-heart promise of chapter 36; the phrase new covenant itself is Jeremiah's (Jeremiah 31:31), and Ezekiel's own term is everlasting covenant, so if the group raises it, honor the question and promise it a payoff.

Session Goals

1. The group can state in their own words where and when the vision happened, and why the location is shocking.
2. The group concludes for themselves, from the wheels and the movement of the vision, that God's throne is mobile and his presence is not confined to the temple.
3. The group encounters and answers, from the text's own dating, the strongest skeptical reading of the vision.
4. The group notices what Ezekiel's own grammar does as he approaches the throne, and why a careful priest would write that way.
5. Every participant leaves with the Take-Home sheet and understands the sealed My Guess mechanics.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

For 75 minutes: opening prayer and Win, 12 minutes; the reading of chapter 1, 8 minutes; Build questions 1 through 5, about 28 minutes, with the discovery at question 5 getting a full 10; questions 6 through 8, about 17 minutes, with the steelman at question 7 getting a full 10; Send, Live It, memory verse, sealed-guess mechanics and closing prayer, 10 minutes. For 90 minutes, give the discovery and the steelman the extra room. This session was split out of a longer one and now has air in it; use the air on silence rather than on more explanation.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut question 2 (the storm out of the north) first; fold its one essential point, that gods were assumed territorial, into your setup for question 7.
2. Cut the Dig Deeper boxes next.
3. If still pressed, merge questions 3 and 4 into a single question: 'What do the creatures and the wheels together tell you this throne can do?'
4. Never cut question 5 (the discovery), question 7 (the steelman), or the sealed-guess explanation.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you are not far from any one of us. We come from a week of ordinary places, and we ask you to open the heavens over this room the way you opened them over an exile by a canal in Babylon. Give us eyes to see your glory, humility to fall on our faces before it, and appetite to eat your word and find it sweet. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. Tell us about a time you were far from home, and something unexpected suddenly made you feel that home had come to you.

W2. When your life has gone badly wrong, where do you instinctively go, or what do you instinctively do, to look for God?

Keep this warm and unhurried; both questions are secretly loading tonight's theme, but do not say so.

Read

Read aloud

Read Ezekiel 1 aloud in three parts with a short pause between each. Reader 1: verses 1 to 14. Reader 2: verses 15 to 25. Reader 3: verses 26 to 28, coached to slow right down. Ask everyone to listen for two things: where this is happening, and what direction things move. Stop at the end of the chapter. The voice that begins speaking in verse 28 is next week.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

By the Waters of Babylon

1. Before anything strange happens, verses 1 to 3 give us a person, a place, and a date. What do we actually learn about Ezekiel and his situation, and why might each detail matter?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Ezekiel is a priest (1:3), deported to Babylonia with King Jehoiachin's wave of exiles, and it is now the fifth year of that exile, 593 BC by our reckoning. He is 'among the exiles by the river Chebar,' an irrigation canal in Babylonia, hundreds of miles from Jerusalem. The 'thirtieth year' is most likely his age, and if so it stings: thirty is the age Numbers 4:3 sets for Levitical service at the tent of meeting, and many interpreters read Ezekiel's line against it. This is the year his whole vocation was supposed to start, and he is in the one place on earth where it is impossible. Every detail says wrong man, wrong place, wrong time. And then: 'the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of

God.' The most important word in the whole setup is the address.

2. The vision arrives in verse 4 as a great storm cloud flashing with fire. What did the exiles, and everyone around them, assume about where a nation's god lived, and what is this storm already contradicting just by showing up here?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

In the ancient world gods were widely assumed to be territorial: a god lived in his land and his temple, and when your nation lost, your god had lost. By that logic the LORD had been defeated and left behind in Judah, and the exiles were now in Marduk's territory. The storm contradicts all of it. Storm, cloud, fire, and brightness are Sinai language (Exodus 19), the signature weather of the God of Israel arriving in power, and it is rolling toward an exile in Babylonia under its own steam. Nobody carried this God here as a trophy. He came.

The Creatures and the Wheels

3. Look closely at the four living creatures in verses 5 to 14. List their features. Never mind decoding the symbolism yet: what do the features, taken together, let these creatures do?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Each has four faces (man, lion, ox, eagle) looking in four directions at once, four wings, legs that gleam like burnished bronze, and they move 'wherever the spirit would go... without turning as they went' (1:12), darting like lightning. Take the features functionally: they see in every direction simultaneously, and they can move any direction instantly, without ever needing to turn around. Nothing is behind their back. Nothing is outside their view. Whatever these beings are carrying can go anywhere and misses nothing. Worth naming: Babylon's monuments were covered with winged composite guardian creatures, so the exiles are seeing their conquerors' visual language commandeered, and the creatures turn out to serve the God of Israel.

4. Now the wheels, verses 15 to 21: a wheel within a wheel, rims full of eyes, moving with the creatures wherever the spirit goes. Here is the real question: what kind of throne needs wheels?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A throne that travels. This is a chariot-throne, and that is the vision's thesis in a single piece of furniture. The exiles assumed God's throne was bolted to the floor of the holy of holies in Jerusalem; Ezekiel is shown that it rolls, in any direction, wherever God wills, and its rims are full of eyes so that nowhere it goes is unseen. God was never a prisoner of his own temple, and therefore he cannot be evicted from it, and therefore exile cannot cut his people off from him. The wheels are the whole book in miniature.

Dig Deeper

Later Jewish tradition named this vision the *merkabah*, the chariot, and treated it as the most dangerous text in Scripture to expound, with some teachers restricting its study. St. Gregory the Great preached a whole series on it and read the wheel within a wheel as the New Testament turning inside the Old: one revelation, in motion, never stuck.

Live discovery

Split into two teams. Team 1: turn to Exodus 24:9-10 and answer two things: what do the elders of Israel see under God's feet, and where in the world are they standing when they see it? Team 2: turn to Revelation 4:2-8 and list every detail John sees that you have already met tonight in Ezekiel 1. Give the teams four or five minutes, then have each report.

Let them find it. Exodus 24:9-10; Revelation 4:2-8

5. This vision does not come from nowhere, and it does not go nowhere. Let's find its roots and its future ourselves.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Team 1 finds sapphire under God's feet at Sinai, 'as it were a pavement of sapphire stone,' matching the throne 'in appearance like sapphire' in Ezekiel 1:26, and they find that the elders saw it in the wilderness: no temple, no city, a people between homes. God has appeared gloriously outside a building before; Ezekiel's exiles are not the first. Team 2 finds a throne in heaven, one seated on it with the gleam of precious stone, four living creatures carrying the same four symbolic forms, lion, ox, man, eagle, and unceasing worship. If someone notices the difference, name it: Ezekiel gives all four faces to each creature, while John gives one face to each. The throne Ezekiel glimpsed by a canal is, in John's vision, the permanent center of heaven, where the worship never stopped, not even during the exile. Sinai behind it, heaven above it: Babylon was never outside this throne's range.

The Throne and the Glory

6. Read verses 26 to 28 again slowly and count the hedge words: 'likeness,' 'appearance,' 'as it were.' By verse 28 Ezekiel is at three removes: 'the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.' Why is the prophet's grammar breaking, and what does he do the moment he sees it?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. If the group is struggling: just ask what it feels like when words fail you, and why words failing might be the honest response to God.

Ground. Walk the three removes in 1:28 out loud and let the group articulate why a priest would write that carefully.

Depth. Put 1:26 next to John 1:14 and Colossians 1:15 and let the group weigh how far the 'human form' on the throne can responsibly be read as a foreshadowing, and where honesty requires us to stop.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The grammar is breaking because language is hitting its ceiling. Ezekiel is a careful priest and he refuses to claim more than he saw: not God, not even God's glory nakedly, but the appearance of the likeness of it. That stacked hedging is itself theology: God so transcends every creature that our words about him strain and crack (the Catechism makes exactly this point at CCC 42). And yet notice what sits at the very top of the vision: 'a likeness as it were of a human form' (1:26). Reading backward from Bethlehem, the Church has long seen here a shadowed hint that God's glory would one day show us a human face (John 1:14); hold that as the Church's retrospective reading rather than Ezekiel's conscious prediction. Ezekiel's own response is the right one: he falls on his face. Glory is met

first with worship, not analysis.

7. Let's be honest about the strongest way to read this chapter against faith. Here is how a serious skeptic would put it. Take it seriously before you answer.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Ezekiel 1 is best explained as trauma literature and theological damage control. A people whose national god lived in a temple just watched Babylon win. The psychologically predictable move is to relocate your god so the defeat doesn't count: borrow the winners' imagery, and Babylon was full of winged hybrid creatures and divine thrones, then announce that your god actually chose to come here. Every displaced people tells itself a story like this. The vision tells us about the exiles' coping, not about God.

Answering from the text. The objection deserves respect, and it has a stronger form still: a critical reader can treat the dates themselves as literary, part of a book edited into shape long after the events, in which case the chronology proves nothing. Say that version out loud before you answer it. What the text gives us is this: as the book stands, the vision is dated 593 BC, with the temple still standing and seven years left to it, and the case for wholesale later invention has to explain why an editor would compose a prophet whose early message is the opposite of comfort. Ezekiel, as the book presents him, is not rationalizing a catastrophe after the fact; he will spend the next twenty chapters predicting it, against the desperate hopes of his own audience, who wanted to hear that the exile would be short and Jerusalem was safe. Comfort literature does not tell its readers 'your god has come to Babylon and your beloved city will burn anyway.' Ezekiel was resisted and disregarded for this message, not consoled by it. As for the borrowed imagery: the vision does speak Babylon's visual language, but as an act of confrontation, planting the LORD's throne, rolling and sovereign, in the conquerors' own front yard. And the book proposes its own test in 2:5: whether they hear or refuse, 'they will know that there has been a prophet among them.' The book presents its warnings as fulfilled. None of this compels faith, but the coping-mechanism theory fails to explain the actual text: a pre-disaster vision carrying an anti-consolation message that its first audience did not want.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The key move the group should make: check the date. The vision precedes the temple's destruction by seven years, and Ezekiel's early message is the opposite of comfort. A community inventing a coping story does not invent a prophet who tells them their last hope will burn. The borrowed Babylonian imagery is real, and it works as defiance, not surrender: the throne of the God of Israel rolling through Babylon's home territory.

Face down

8. The chapter ends with one sentence about Ezekiel himself: 'when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking' (1:28). Why might the book end its opening vision there, and what does his reaction tell us that a description of the throne could not?

Take it as far as the room wants

Ground. Ask when they last encountered something that made explanation feel beside the point.

Depth. Ask what it means that the vision produces worship before it produces instruction, and whether that order is reversible.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Two things worth landing. First, the posture: the only appropriate response to the glory is on the floor, and Ezekiel, a priest trained in how to behave around holy things, does not describe himself as studying the vision but as flattened by it. The vision is not information he processes; it is a Presence that puts him down. Second, the ending is deliberately unfinished. The last clause opens a door: a voice begins to speak, and the chapter stops. Ezekiel has been given a throne and not yet a message. That is exactly where the group should leave tonight, because next week is what the voice says. If someone has read ahead and wants to tell everyone, thank them warmly and ask them to keep it.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where in your life right now, a place, a situation, a season, have you been quietly assuming God is not present?

S2. If you really believed the heavens can open in Babylon, what would you do differently this week?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Once this week, read Psalm 137 slowly and pray it on behalf of anyone you know who feels exiled from the life they expected.
2. Each day, name one 'Chebar' in your life, the most ordinary or godforsaken-feeling place in your routine, and pray one sentence there: 'Lord, open the heavens here.'
3. At Mass this Sunday, at the consecration, remember Ezekiel falling on his face before the glory, and let your posture, inside or out, answer the same Presence.
4. Memorize this week's verse; say it once each morning before you look at your phone.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 1:1

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

Ezekiel 1:1

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, your throne is not bolted to any floor, and your glory is not stopped by any border. Thank you that you came to your people in the place of their defeat. Come to us in ours. Where we have decided you are absent, open the heavens. Teach us to fall on our faces before we start explaining, and bring us back next week ready to hear what the voice says. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 1** read in three parts: 1-14, 15-25, 26-28

Background (leader preparation)

- **2 Kings 24:10-16** the 597 BC deportation that brought Ezekiel to Babylon
- **Numbers 4:3** priestly service beginning at thirty
- **Psalm 137:1-4** the exiles' emotional register; used in Live It This Week
- **Exodus 19:16-18** Sinai storm imagery behind Ezekiel 1:4
- **Exodus 40:34-35** the glory fills the tabernacle
- **1 Kings 8:10-11** the glory fills the temple

Discovery passages (do not reveal in advance)

- **Exodus 24:9-10** Team 1: sapphire under God's feet, in the wilderness
- **Revelation 4:2-8** Team 2: the same throne and creatures in heaven

Supporting texts in Build answers

- **John 1:14** the glory shown a human face (question 6, held carefully)
- **Acts 7:55-56** leader prep: heavens opened outside the temple

Terms

- ****kabod.**** glory; the weighty, visible presence of God that filled tabernacle and temple
- ****merkabah.**** chariot; later Jewish tradition's name for this throne vision

Catechism

- **CCC 300.** God transcends his works yet is present to his creatures
- **CCC 42.** our language about God must be purified; hence Ezekiel's hedged grammar
- **CCC 1137.** the heavenly liturgy centered on the throne
- **CCC 104.** Scripture as the Church's nourishment; the eaten scroll

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 2. The Scroll and the Sending

Reading: Ezekiel 2:1-3:15

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that God's word has to be taken inside a person before it can be spoken through one, that Ezekiel is made responsible for faithfulness and not for results, and that the God who calls an ordinary mortal 'son of man' also supplies the strength to stand.

Catholic Touchstone

Scripture as the food of the Christian life, and vocation as God's initiative: the one who is sent is first fed, and grace supplies what the command requires.

Last week the throne arrived in Babylon. Tonight the man on the ground gets his orders, and the orders are strange. God does not hand Ezekiel a message; he hands him a scroll and tells him to eat it. Before that, God calls him by a title that will follow him through the whole book, 'son of man', which in Hebrew means simply a mortal, one of the human race. And before Ezekiel can obey the command to stand, the Spirit puts him on his feet. Keep those three moves in front of the group tonight: God names him small, God stands him up, God feeds him before he sends him. The session ends where the chapter ends, with a prophet sitting overwhelmed among the exiles for seven days without saying a word. Do not rush that ending. It is one of the most pastorally useful verses in the book for anyone who has ever felt flattened by something God asked of them.

What You Need to Know

Where we are

This is the second half of Ezekiel's call. Chapter 1 gave the vision; chapters 2 and 3 give the commission. The two belong together, and the group has already met the storm, the creatures, the wheels and the glory. Tonight's question is what that vision is for. The answer is not spectacle. The answer is a man with a message he did not choose, sent to people who will not listen.

'Son of man', and what it does and does not mean

The title appears here for the first time (2:1) and recurs more than ninety times in the book; God almost never calls Ezekiel anything else. The Hebrew is *ben adam*, literally son of Adam, and in Ezekiel it means a mortal, a mere human being. The point is contrast: the one on the throne addresses the one on the ground, and never lets him forget which is which. Resist the urge to jump to Jesus tonight. Daniel 7:13 uses a similar phrase for a very different figure, and the Gospels' use of the title is its own question. Point the title out, define it, and let it accumulate.

The scroll and what is written on it

In 2:9-10 a hand holds out a scroll and unrolls it, and Ezekiel notices two things: it is written on the front and on the back, which was unusual and means it is full, and its content is 'words of lamentation and mourning and woe'. Then in 3:1-3 God tells him to eat it, and it tastes sweet as honey. Do not resolve that

tension for the group. The sweetness is not the subject matter; it is the word itself, because of whose word it is.

The hard forehead

In 3:4-9 God tells Ezekiel he is not being sent to foreigners whose speech he cannot understand, and adds, pointedly, that foreigners would have listened. Israel will not, because the house of Israel has a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. So God gives Ezekiel a harder one: 'like adamant harder than flint have I made your forehead'. The name Ezekiel itself means God strengthens, and the pun is probably deliberate. What God hardens here is endurance, not the heart; keep that distinction available, because someone may hear an echo of Pharaoh.

The seven silent days

The commission ends at Tel-abib by the river Chebar with Ezekiel sitting among the exiles for seven days, 'overwhelmed' (3:15), saying nothing. Seven days is the traditional span of mourning in Israel; compare Job's friends, who sat with him seven days and said nothing (Job 2:13), which is the last thing they did well. Ezekiel goes in bitterness and in the heat of his spirit, and the hand of the LORD is strong upon him. The book does not treat that as failure. It treats it as the beginning of his ministry.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The prophetic call, and Ezekiel's version of it

Israel's call narratives share a recognizable shape: an encounter, a commission, an objection or a fear, and a divine reassurance that touches the prophet's mouth. Isaiah has his lips touched with a coal (Isaiah 6:6-7); Jeremiah has God's hand touch his mouth and hears 'be not afraid of them' (Jeremiah 1:9, 1:17). Ezekiel's version is the strangest of the three: he does not merely have his mouth touched, he eats. And unlike Isaiah, he is never asked whether he will go.

Eating the word

Jeremiah, a generation earlier, says something close: your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart (Jeremiah 15:16). Psalm 19:10 calls God's ordinances sweeter than honey, and Psalm 119:103 says the same of his words. Deuteronomy 8:3 had already told Israel that man does not live by bread alone but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. Ezekiel takes the metaphor and makes it an action.

Fulfillment: John eats the same scroll

In Revelation 10:8-11 an angel hands John a little scroll and tells him to take and eat it: sweet as honey in his mouth and bitter in his stomach, and then, 'you must again prophesy about many peoples and nations'. John is reworking Ezekiel deliberately, and he adds the aftertaste Ezekiel leaves for the reader to infer. The group will find this themselves tonight, so do not name the passage in advance.

Fulfillment: the Word that is a person

The Christian reading does not stop at a book. The word Ezekiel had to take inside himself is, in the fullness of time, a person to be received: the Word made flesh (John 1:14), given as food (John 6:51). Hold this lightly and offer it once. The session's aim is not to allegorize the scroll into the Eucharist, but the instinct that God's word is eaten rather than merely studied is the same instinct, and it is worth naming.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Jerome, d. 420

Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.

Commentary on Isaiah, prologue.

For the group. Ezekiel is told to fill his stomach with the scroll before he opens his mouth. Jerome's line is the same conviction in six words, and the Catechism quotes it (CCC 133) when it urges all the faithful to read Scripture often.

St. Gregory the Great, d. 604

Gregory reads the scroll written on front and back as a picture of Scripture's own fullness: there is what stands on the surface, and there is what waits inside for the reader who keeps chewing. He also insists, repeatedly, that the preacher must be fed before he feeds anyone, since a man cannot pour out what he has not taken in.

Homilies on Ezekiel, Book 1 (no section number claimed). Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For a leader preparing a session: this is the argument for reading Part One earlier in the week rather than in the car. Gregory would say the group can tell the difference.

St. Ambrose, d. 397

Ambrose teaches that prayer and the reading of Scripture are two halves of one conversation: we speak to God when we pray, and we listen to him when we read what he has spoken.

On the Duties of the Clergy (De officiis ministrorum) I.20.88. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Ezekiel eats before he speaks. Ambrose gives the group the ordinary version of that, available this week: read, then answer. The Second Vatican Council took up his line in *Dei Verbum* 25, and the Catechism carries it at CCC 2653.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 101. In order to reveal himself, God condescends to speak in human words; the words of God, expressed in human language, have become like human speech, as the Word of the Father took on the flesh of human weakness. Ezekiel's scroll is a hand holding out human words that are God's.

CCC 104. In Sacred Scripture the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength; in the sacred books the Father meets his children and speaks with them. Tonight's command to eat is that paragraph as an action.

CCC 133. The Church urges all the faithful to learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ by frequent reading of the Scriptures, quoting Jerome's warning that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.

CCC 2653. The Church forcefully and specially exhorts all the Christian faithful to learn Christ by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures, and recalls that prayer should accompany that reading, so that a dialogue takes place between God and the reader.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Son of man (plant). The title lands at 2:1 and never leaves. Define it once tonight as 'mere mortal, one of the human race', make sure someone says it aloud, and then stop. Its collision with Jesus' use of the title pays off much later in the study; do not front-run it, and do not let a well-catechized participant turn tonight into a Daniel 7 discussion. If someone raises Daniel, say that the phrase there does different work and that the study will get to it.

The opened mouth (plant). Tonight God opens Ezekiel's mouth to put something in it (2:8; 3:2). Next session God closes it (3:26-27). The mouth is not fully opened again until the fugitive comes with news of the fall. Plant the image quietly tonight, ideally by letting the group notice that God feeds the prophet before he charges him. Say nothing about the muteness that is coming.

Follow the glory (develop). At 3:12 the Spirit lifts Ezekiel and he hears a great rushing sound behind him as the glory rises from its place. That is the first time in the book the glory moves. Make sure the group notices the movement and nothing more. Do not say 'watch where it goes next'; the whole architecture of sessions 4 and 15 depends on them not seeing it coming. Note for you: the Hebrew of 3:12 has a well-known text-critical difficulty and translations differ, so describe the verse rather than quoting it as a proof text.

Sealed guess (develop). Collect the sealed sheets tonight if you did not last week. Put them in the envelope in front of the group, say nothing about anyone's answer, and do not speculate about the question yourself. They are opened at session 12. If someone asks whether tonight changed their guess, smile and tell them to keep it to themselves.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

'Like adamant harder than flint have I made your forehead' sounds like God hardening a heart, which is the thing people find most objectionable in the Bible. Is God overriding Ezekiel here?

Distinguish two things the English blurs. What God hardens in 3:8-9 is Ezekiel's endurance under opposition, the capacity to keep speaking when nobody wants to hear him, and Ezekiel does not resist it. The hardening that troubles people is a different question, about Pharaoh in Exodus, and the Catholic reading there is judicial permission rather than divine coercion, which this study meets head on at 14:9 and again at 20:25-26. Tonight's verse is closer to Jeremiah 1:18, where God makes the prophet a fortified city and an iron pillar. It is armour, not compulsion.

The prophetic call story is a literary form. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all follow the same template, which suggests we are reading a convention rather than an event.

Leader only, and worth having ready because it is a serious point rather than a cheap one. The form is real; scholars have described it carefully, and it is no more suspicious than the fact that letters share a shape. Two things are worth saying if it comes up. First, shared form does not settle historicity in either direction. Second, the differences are where Ezekiel is interesting: he is given no chance to object, he is promised failure rather than success, and the scroll he is fed contains lamentation. Those are odd things to invent, and the book's claim does not depend on its call narrative being formally unique.

Session Goals

1. The group can say what 'son of man' means in Ezekiel and why God uses it, without importing the Gospels yet.
2. The group concludes for themselves, from 2:3-7, that Ezekiel is made responsible for speaking and not for the response.
3. The group discovers the eaten-scroll image in a second biblical author and can say what John adds to it.

4. The group can hold the tension between a scroll full of lamentation and a taste like honey, without dissolving it.
5. Every participant leaves with a concrete way to take Scripture in this week, and the sealed guesses are collected and put away.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

For 75 minutes: opening prayer and Win, 10 minutes; the reading, 8 minutes; Build questions 1 through 5, about 30 minutes, with the discovery at question 5 getting a full 10; Build 6 through 9, about 17 minutes; Send, Live It, memory verse and closing prayer, 10 minutes. For 90 minutes, give the discovery and question 9 the extra room; the seven silent days deserve a slow ending rather than a rushed one.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper boxes first and point to them on the Take-Home.
2. Cut question 4 (the hard forehead) next; its essential point, that God supplies what the calling requires, can be folded into your setup for question 6.
3. If still pressed, merge questions 2 and 3 into one: 'What is Ezekiel actually made responsible for, and what is he explicitly not responsible for?'
4. Never cut question 5 (the discovery), question 8 (the steelman), or the closing question on the seven days.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you spoke and there was light, and you speak still. Open our ears tonight, and open our hands to take what you give. Give us appetite for your word, even the parts of it we would not have chosen. And when your word is heavy, teach us to sit with it, and with each other, before we say anything at all. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. What is the best or worst thing anyone has ever asked you to do without asking first whether you wanted to?

W2. Think of something you know so well it has become part of how you think: a song, a recipe, a skill, a story. How did it get in there?

Both questions are quietly loading tonight's theme, so let them be genuinely light. The first is heading toward a commission nobody volunteered for; the second is heading toward eating a scroll. Do not explain either connection now.

Read

Read aloud

Read Ezekiel 2:1 to 3:15 aloud in three parts, with a short pause between each. Part one, 2:1-7, the commission. Part two, 2:8 to 3:3, the scroll. Part three, 3:4-15, the sending and the silence. Use three readers. Ask everyone to listen in part two for what is written on the scroll and what it tastes like, and to keep the two facts side by side rather than smoothing them out.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

Stand up, son of man (2:1-2)

1. Look closely at the first two verses. God gives a command, and then something happens before Ezekiel obeys it. What is the order of events, and what does that order tell you about how God works with people?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God says 'stand upon your feet' (2:1), and then 'the Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet' (2:2). The command comes first and the ability comes second, from God. Ezekiel is genuinely the one standing; he is not lifted like a puppet. But he does not manufacture the strength to obey out of his own resources. This is the pattern the whole book will keep making, and it is the pattern the Church means when she says grace does not replace our action but makes it possible. Note also what God calls him at the exact moment he is being commissioned: son of

man, a mortal. God addresses him at his smallest and then supplies what the smallness lacks.

Dig Deeper

Set 2:2 beside Philippians 2:12-13, where Paul tells the Philippians to work out their own salvation, because God is at work in them both to will and to work. Same structure: a real command, a real human act, and God supplying the power for it from inside.

The job description (2:3-7)

2. Underline everything God tells Ezekiel to expect from his audience. Then underline what God actually requires of Ezekiel. What is on each list, and what is conspicuously missing?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. If the room is quiet: just ask what God tells Ezekiel to say, and what God says about whether anyone will listen.

Ground. Ask what it would change about their own conversations about faith if the outcome were not their responsibility.

Depth. Press on the difference between not being responsible for outcomes and not caring about them. Ezekiel goes away in bitterness of spirit (3:14); indifference is not what this text produces.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The expectations are bleak and completely explicit: a nation of rebels, impudent and stubborn, briars and thorns and scorpions, and twice over, 'whether they hear or refuse to hear'. What God requires is one thing: 'you shall speak my words to them' (2:7). What is missing from the requirement list is any mention of results. Success is not promised and it is not asked for. The stated measure is 2:5: they will know that there has been a prophet among them. Let the group sit with how strange that is as a job offer, and how freeing it would be if they believed it about their own witness.

3. Twice God says 'be not afraid' (2:6). Given what he has just told Ezekiel to expect, what exactly is Ezekiel being told not to fear, and what is he not being told?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He is told not to fear their words and their faces, and not to be dismayed at their looks. He is not told that they will be gentle, that the assignment will work, or that he will be protected from difficulty. The fear being addressed is the specific, ordinary fear of other people's disapproval, which is the fear that silences most witnesses most of the time. Note that God does not remove the danger; he addresses the fear directly. Jeremiah 1:8 and 1:17 do the same thing in almost the same words.

A hard forehead, and a harder one (3:4-9)

4. In 3:5-6 God makes a comparison that is almost sarcastic. What is it, and what is the sting in it? Then look at what God does about Israel's hard forehead in verses 8 and 9.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God says he is not sending Ezekiel to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, and then adds that if he had, they would have listened. The sting is that the barrier is not linguistic. The people who share the prophet's language, history and covenant are the ones who will not hear, and God says so plainly. Then, instead of softening Israel, God hardens Ezekiel: 'like adamant harder than flint have I made your forehead'. God does not give him a different audience; he gives him a different capacity. The name Ezekiel means God strengthens, and the wordplay is probably deliberate.

Dig Deeper

Compare Jeremiah 1:18, where God makes the prophet a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls against the whole land. The armour language is the same, and in both cases it is given rather than achieved.

Eat this scroll (2:8-3:3)

Live discovery

Split into two teams before you ask the question. Team 1: turn to Jeremiah 15:16 and answer two things, what Jeremiah does with God's words and what it does to him. Team 2: turn to Revelation 10:8-11 and answer two things, what John is told to do and what happens in his mouth and afterwards. Give them four minutes, then have each team report before anyone comments.

Let them find it. Jeremiah 15:16; Revelation 10:8-11

5. Now look at the scroll itself in 2:9-3:3. What is written on it, how much of it is there, and what does it taste like? What do you make of those facts together, especially now that you have heard what your teams found?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The scroll is written on the front and on the back, which in a world of one-sided scrolls means it is full; there is no room for additions. Its content is 'words of lamentation and mourning and woe' (2:10). And when Ezekiel eats it, it is 'as sweet as honey' (3:3). Do not resolve that. The sweetness is not the subject matter, it is the source: this is God's word, and God's word is sweet because of whose it is, even when what it says is grief. Team 1 finds Jeremiah saying almost the same thing, that he ate God's words and they became the joy of his heart, which shows Ezekiel is working a shared prophetic instinct rather than inventing an image. Team 2 finds John doing the same act six centuries later, with the aftertaste made explicit: sweet in the mouth, bitter in the stomach, and then sent to prophesy again. John is reading Ezekiel and finishing his sentence. What all three share is that the word is not merely studied, it is taken in, and it changes the one who takes it.

Dig Deeper

The Church's oldest practice for eating the word is *lectio divina*: read, meditate, pray, contemplate. CCC 2708 describes meditation on Scripture as engaging thought, imagination, emotion and desire, which is a fair description of chewing something rather than glancing at it.

6. Verse 3:1 has an odd little phrase before the command: 'eat what is offered to you'. Why might God insist that the prophet take in the message before he takes it out?

Take it as far as the room wants

Ground. Ask where they have seen the difference between someone passing on information and someone speaking out of something they have actually lived.

Depth. Push into the risk: what does it cost to let a hard word be true of you first, before you say it to anyone else?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Because the alternative is a messenger who has not been changed by his own message, which the book will spend chapters exposing in the false prophets who speak out of their own hearts. Ezekiel has to have the word inside him before it is on his lips. Gregory the Great presses this at the practical level for anyone who teaches: you cannot pour out what you have not taken in. Note the sequence across the whole call: God stands him up, God feeds him, and only then does God send him.

Sent home (3:10-11)

7. God tells Ezekiel to receive the words 'in your heart' and hear them 'with your ears' before going to the exiles. Then he sends him to a very specific address. Who is Ezekiel sent to, and why is that detail worth noticing?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He is sent to the exiles, to his own people, the ones sitting in the same camp he is sitting in. Not to Jerusalem, not to Babylon's court, not to the nations. He is a deported priest sent to deported people, and he will live among them for the rest of the book. The mission is not an escape from his situation; it is his situation, handed back to him as a calling. For a room full of young adults who suspect their real life is somewhere else, that is the night's most practical sentence.

8. Let us take the strongest version of the objection to what we have just read, and take it seriously before we answer it.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. This commission scene is a literary convention, not a memory. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all have the same call narrative: an encounter with God, a commission, a difficulty, a divine reassurance, a sign involving the mouth. Scholars have identified the form precisely, and forms are things authors use. So what we are reading is how ancient Israel wrote about prophetic authority, not a transcript of what happened to a man by a canal. Read it as literature and it makes sense; read it as history and you are asking it to be something it never claimed to be.

Answering from the text. Concede the true part first, because it is true: the form is real, it is well described, and Ezekiel is clearly working inside a recognized shape. But notice what follows and what does not. A shared form tells us nothing by itself about whether an event stands behind it; letters share a form, and most of them report real things. And the differences here are the interesting part. Isaiah is asked whether he will go and volunteers; Ezekiel is never asked. Jeremiah objects and is answered; Ezekiel raises no objection at all. Most tellingly, the scroll he is fed contains lamentation and mourning and woe, and the mission is announced as a failure in advance, twice. If a

community were composing a charter for prophetic authority, promising the prophet that nobody will listen is a strange way to write it. The honest position, and the one to model for the group, is that the form is a real feature of the text, that the historical question cannot be settled from the form either way, and that the claim this book makes does not rest on its call narrative being unique.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The move to walk the group through is the second one: look for what the convention does not explain. Any group can be taught to spot a genre. The harder and more useful skill is noticing the details that the genre would not have produced, and this passage has three of them: no invitation, no objection, and a guarantee of failure. Say plainly that this does not prove the vision happened. It shows that the easy explanation does not do all the work it promises.

Seven days (3:12-15)

9. The chapter ends with the Spirit lifting Ezekiel, a great sound behind him, and then a man sitting still. Read 3:14-15 again. How does Ezekiel feel, what does he do about it, and what does the text say about God while he is doing it?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Ask simply: what does Ezekiel do for the first week of his ministry?

Ground. Ask why sitting with people before speaking to them might be part of the calling rather than a delay in it.

Depth. Ask what it means that the hand of the LORD is described as strong upon him in the same breath as his bitterness. What does that do to the assumption that God's nearness should feel good?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He goes 'in bitterness in the heat of my spirit', and the hand of the LORD is strong upon him. Then he comes to the exiles at Tel-abib, sits where they sit, and stays there seven days, overwhelmed. Three things worth landing. First, the honesty: obedience and devastation are in the same sentence, and the book does not treat that as a failure of faith. Anyone who has obeyed God while feeling wrecked is in prophetic company. Second, the seven days are the traditional span of mourning, and Job's friends did their best work in exactly that silence (Job 2:13). Third, before Ezekiel says one word to the exiles, he sits where they sit. God's messenger begins with shared presence, not with a speech. Land the session here and let it be quiet.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where in your life are you carrying a responsibility for someone else's response that was never actually yours?

S2. What would it look like this week to take Scripture in rather than look at it: to eat it rather than read about it?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Take one paragraph of Scripture a day this week, the same paragraph if you like, and read it slowly four times: once to hear it, once to think about it, once to pray it back, once in silence. That is lectio divina, and it is the Church's oldest way of eating the word.
2. Pick one person you have been quietly managing, praying for results rather than for them. Hand the outcome back to God this week, out loud, and keep the faithfulness that is actually yours.
3. Sit with someone in something hard this week without offering a solution. Seven days is more than most of us give; try twenty minutes.
4. Memorize this week's verse and say it before you open your phone in the morning.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 3:3

"And he said to me, 'Son of man, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.' Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey."

Ezekiel 3:3

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you do not send us out empty. You feed us first, and you stand us on our feet before you ask us to walk. Put your word in our mouths this week and make it sweet, even when it is heavy. Free us from the weight of results that were never ours to carry, and teach us to sit down beside the people you have already put next to us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 2:1-3:15** read in three parts: 2:1-7, 2:8-3:3, 3:4-15

Discovery passages, do not read aloud before question 5

- **Jeremiah 15:16** Team 1: the prophet who ate God's words
- **Revelation 10:8-11** Team 2: John eats a scroll, sweet then bitter

Supporting texts in Build answers

- **Isaiah 6:6-8** the coal and the volunteer, for contrast with Ezekiel
- **Jeremiah 1:8-9, 17-18** do not be afraid of their faces; the iron pillar
- **Deuteronomy 8:3** not by bread alone
- **Psalms 19:10** sweeter than honey
- **Philippians 2:12-13** Dig Deeper on question 1
- **Job 2:13** seven days of silent presence (question 9)
- **John 1:14; 6:51** leader prep only: the Word received as food, offered once and lightly
- **Daniel 7:13** leader prep: the other 'son of man', do not conflate

Terms

- **ben adam.** son of man; in Ezekiel, simply a mortal, one of the human race
- **Tel-abib.** the settlement of exiles by the river Chebar where Ezekiel sits for seven days

Catechism

- **CCC 101.** God speaks in human words
- **CCC 104.** Scripture as the Church's nourishment; the Father meets his children in it
- **CCC 133.** frequent reading of Scripture; Jerome's warning
- **CCC 2653.** prayer accompanying the reading of Scripture
- **CCC 2708.** meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion and desire

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 3. The Watchman and the Brick

Reading: Ezekiel 3:16-5:17

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that Ezekiel is made responsible for warning, not for results, and that God makes the prophet's own body the sermon.

Catholic Touchstone

The duty of fraternal correction and witness: speaking truth in love is a work of mercy whose outcome belongs to God, and the sacramental instinct that God communicates spiritual realities through bodily signs.

Last week the group watched the glory of God roll into Babylon on a throne of wheels. Tonight the vision gets a job description. Ezekiel is appointed watchman, given the strangest set of duties in the prophetic corpus, and then, astonishingly, silenced. For roughly a year his sermon is not his voice but his body: a clay brick under siege, a man tied down on his side, rationed bread, a shaved head. Two things should land by the end of the night. First, God draws a bright, merciful line between the watchman's duty (sound the warning) and the hearer's response (not his to control). Second, God is already doing something he will keep doing all the way to Bethlehem: preaching through flesh.

What You Need to Know

Where we are in the story

Session 2 ended with Ezekiel sitting overwhelmed among the exiles at Tel-abib for seven days (3:15). Tonight opens at the end of that week: the word of the LORD comes and gives the stunned man his commission. Everything in this passage happens in Babylon among the first wave of exiles, years before Jerusalem actually falls. The people around Ezekiel still believe the city is safe, the temple untouchable, and the exile short. His entire assignment tonight is to contradict that comfortable story.

What a watchman was

Ancient walled cities posted a sentry on the wall or a tower. His whole job was to see danger while it was still far off and blow the trumpet. He could not make anyone take shelter; he could only make sure no one died unwarned. If he blew the trumpet and people ignored it, their deaths were on them. If he saw the sword coming and stayed silent, their blood was on him. Ezekiel is not the first prophet given this image (the group does not need this list, but you do): Jeremiah 6:17 and Habakkuk 2:1 use the same figure. What is distinctive in Ezekiel 3:16-21 is how precisely God spells out the four cases and where responsibility falls in each.

Sign-acts: a real prophetic genre, not a breakdown

Ezekiel's street theater sits inside an established prophetic tradition of commanded symbolic action. Isaiah walked stripped and barefoot as a sign against Egypt (Isaiah 20). Jeremiah buried a loincloth, smashed a flask, and wore a yoke (Jeremiah 13, 19, 27). Hosea's marriage was itself the message. Some modern readers reach for psychiatric explanations for Ezekiel; be ready for that (see the objection

bench), but notice what the text itself shows: dated, structured, commanded actions with stated meanings, and a prophet lucid enough to argue back about the cooking fuel and be heard (4:14-15). This is deliberate embodied preaching, not compulsion.

The muteness, honestly

In 3:26-27 God ties Ezekiel's tongue so that he is mute except when God opens his mouth. Since Ezekiel plainly delivers oracles in the following chapters, scholars debate what exactly this means: some read a total muteness lifted for each oracle, others a restriction, meaning he may speak only what God gives him to say. The practical details often attached to that reading, no small talk, no commentary, no reproof on his own initiative, are the interpreters' inference and not the text's statement. The Church has not settled this and you should not either; present it as an open question. What matters for tonight is the theological point both readings share: the watchman's voice belongs entirely to God. Keep 3:27 in view; the book will return to this closed mouth, and it matters that the group notices the setup without being told the payoff.

The numbers in 4:4-6

The Hebrew text gives 390 days for the iniquity of Israel and 40 for Judah, a day for each year. The ancient Greek translation gives different figures, and commentators ancient and modern disagree about which historical periods are meant. Do not manufacture certainty here. The point the text itself insists on is clear regardless: the years of accumulated iniquity are measured, real, and laid out in public, one day at a time, on one man's body.

The brick

In Babylon, soft clay was the writing surface of the whole civilization: contracts, letters, school exercises, and even city plans were incised on clay (a famous surviving tablet carries a plan of the city of Nippur). So when God tells Ezekiel to take a brick and portray Jerusalem on it, he is using the empire's own notepad to publish Jerusalem's fate. The iron plate set between prophet and city (4:3) is the most chilling piece. The text calls it a sign and does not decode it; many interpreters read the plate as something hard and impassable standing between God's face and that city, and that reading is worth offering as a reading. Ezekiel, playing God's part in the siege, presses the attack. This is a sign, the text says, for the house of Israel.

Why chapter 5 turns up the heat

The shaved hair divided into thirds (5:1-4) decodes the whole sequence: plague and famine inside the walls, sword outside, scattering to the winds. But verse 3 hides a small mercy the group should find for themselves: a few hairs bound into the hem of the prophet's garment. Then 5:5-17 gives the indictment. Jerusalem was set at the center of the nations and rebelled more wickedly than the nations around her; election did not lower the stakes, it raised them. Handle this section briskly but do not skip it, because it answers the question every honest reader is asking by now: why is God doing all this?

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The watchman's lineage runs forward, not just back

The watchman figure comes to Ezekiel from the prophetic tradition (Jeremiah 6:17; Habakkuk 2:1; Isaiah 62:6), but its most striking fulfillment is in the New Testament, and the group will find it themselves tonight: St. Paul's farewell at Miletus in Acts 20:26-28 speaks of being innocent of the blood of all, precisely because he did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God. That is Ezekiel's grammar of blood and warning on an apostle's lips, and in the next breath Paul hands the charge to the

overseers of the Church. Paul's charge to the overseers is his own, not a commentary on Ezekiel; but the Church has long heard the watchman's office continuing in the pastoral office, and in a real measure in every baptized witness. Offer that as the tradition's reading rather than as the passage's conclusion.

The body as sermon points toward the Word made flesh

Tonight God preaches through a human body: a bound posture, a rationed diet, a shaved head, a shut mouth. This is the sacramental instinct of the whole economy of salvation, that spiritual realities reach us through flesh and sign (the Catechism grounds this at 1146). The trajectory runs from the sign-acts of the prophets to the Incarnation itself, where the message and the messenger are finally one. Do not preach that whole arc tonight; let the group feel the pattern and name it.

Bearing iniquity: the sign and the substance

In 4:4-6 Ezekiel is told to bear the punishment of the house of Israel on his own side. Be precise here, because the group may leap ahead of the text: Ezekiel's bearing is symbolic. He dramatizes the weight of the people's sin; he does not and cannot atone for it. But the gesture points forward to the Servant of Isaiah 53 who bears iniquity really, and to Christ, who bore our sins in his body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). The honest formulation: Ezekiel carries the sign, Christ carries the substance.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Gregory the Great, d. 604

Preaching on this very passage, St. Gregory teaches that the preacher is called a watchman because a watchman stands on the heights to see danger while it is still far off; whoever would warn others must live on a height of vision and of life. Then, remarkably, this pope turns the text against himself: he confesses that his own tongue does not always preach as it ought and that his life does not always follow even what his tongue manages to say, yet he does not dare fall silent, because the charge to warn still stands.

Homilies on Ezekiel, Book 1, Homily 11. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone in the room who feels too compromised to speak up for the faith: the greatest preacher-pope of the early Middle Ages felt exactly that, and concluded that his weakness excused him from pride, not from the trumpet.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, d. c. 107

I am God's wheat, and I am to be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may become the pure bread of Christ.

Letter to the Romans 4.

For the group. Ignatius, traveling under guard to his execution, understood that his body itself had become his last and loudest sermon. He is the clearest early Christian heir of what God does with Ezekiel tonight: the witness's flesh preaches what words alone cannot.

St. John Henry Newman, d. 1890

God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission.

Meditations and Devotions.

For the group. This is the watchman's charge translated for the person in the chair next to you: a definite, personal commission whose faithful execution, not whose visible success, is what God asks. Newman goes on in the same meditation to draw the conclusion Ezekiel needed: therefore I will trust him, whatever I am, wherever I am.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 1146. As a being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols. This is the principle behind God preaching through Ezekiel's body, and behind the sacramental life.

CCC 1829. Among the fruits and demands of charity the Catechism names fraternal correction: love that never warns is not the charity the Church describes.

CCC 1868. We can bear responsibility for the sins of others when we cooperate in them, including by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so. This is the watchman's blood-on-your-hands principle in the Church's own moral grammar.

CCC 2447. The spiritual works of mercy include instructing, advising and admonishing. Charitable warning is an application of those works, which places it among the works of mercy rather than the works of judgment.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Follow the glory (develop). In 3:23 the glory appears again, out on the plain, the same glory Ezekiel saw by the Chebar. Touch it lightly: the glory is on the move and keeps meeting Ezekiel outside the temple. Do not preview where it goes next; that is Session 4's discovery.

Son of man (develop). The address hammers through tonight's passage (3:17, 3:25, 4:1, 4:16, 5:1). Let someone notice the repetition and simply ask the group to keep counting. Do not resolve it.

The opened mouth (plant). 3:26-27: Ezekiel is made mute except when God opens his mouth. Plant this quietly tonight, ideally in the group's own words. It resolves at Session 9, so resist any urge to explain it now.

The hairs in the hem (plant). 5:3-4: a few hairs bound in the skirt of the garment, and then some even of those thrown into the fire. A remnant kept close, and smaller than it first appears. This seed pays off when God promises to be a sanctuary to a remnant and, later, to give them a new heart. Plant only; no forward references aloud.

Sealed guess (develop). The guesses are sealed and stay sealed until Session 12. If anyone asks, smile and say the envelope is doing its work.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Ezekiel reads like a case study: visions, muteness, lying immobilized for months, compulsive symbolic behavior. Isn't the honest explanation psychiatric rather than prophetic?

Take it seriously, because a thoughtful skeptic will. Three observations from the text itself. First, sign-acts are an established prophetic genre across centuries (Isaiah 20, Jeremiah 13 and 19, Hosea 1-3); Ezekiel is working inside a known public form, not inventing private rituals. Second, the actions are dated, commanded in advance, and given stated public meanings; what the text shows us is deliberate public sign-acting, not private compulsion. Do not go further than that. A retrospective diagnosis at twenty-six centuries is not something anyone can responsibly settle, and the presence of mental illness would not by itself tell against the prophecy. Third, in 4:14-15 Ezekiel objects to one command on grounds of conscience and God adjusts it; that is a lucid moral agent in dialogue, not compulsion. None of this coerces faith, but it removes the shortcut. The real question the book poses is not Ezekiel's sanity; it is whether God actually spoke.

Blood required at your hand: isn't that spiritually abusive, making me guilty for other people's choices?

Read the four cases in 3:18-21 closely and you find the opposite. The watchman is never once held responsible for anyone's response. He is responsible for exactly one thing, the warning, and the moment it is given, the hearer's choice is the hearer's alone. This is a liberation for anyone crushed by the outcome of someone else's decisions. The Catechism's parallel (1868) is similarly bounded: responsibility attaches to real cooperation or culpable silence where there is a duty, not to failing to control another soul.

Why 390 days and 40 days? Older translations and commentaries give different numbers.

Honestly: the Hebrew text reads 390 and 40, the ancient Greek differs, and scholars debate which spans of history are meant. The Church has not defined it and you should not pretend otherwise. Every reading agrees on the point: the iniquity is measured, year by year, and displayed on the prophet's body.

Session Goals

1. The group states in their own words the watchman's exact duty and its exact limit: warn faithfully, and leave the response to the hearer and to God.
2. The group discovers, in the text they find themselves, that the watchman's charge continues into the New Testament and the Church.
3. The group traces each of the sign-acts (brick, posture, rations, hair) and articulates that God is preaching through the prophet's body.
4. The group feels the weight of the strongest opposing reading of 3:20 and answers it from the text.
5. The group leaves with one concrete, charitable act of truth-telling for the week.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

Roughly: Win 10 minutes, reading 12 (this is a long passage, use the reader plan and summaries), watchman block (Q1-Q4) 25, sign-acts block (Q5-Q8) 22, hair and Jerusalem (Q9-Q10) 10, synthesis (Q11) 5, Send, Live It, and closing prayer 8. That is a full 90; use the cuts below in order if you are running a 75-minute room.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Drop the Dig Deeper on Q8 (the Acts echo of Ezekiel's protest); it is a delight, not a load-bearing wall.
2. Compress Q2's four cases to the first and the last (unwarned wicked; warned righteous), stating the middle two in the answer summary.
3. Fold Q9 and Q10 together: trace the thirds and the hem quickly, then summarize 5:5-17 in one sentence and move to Q11.
4. If truly desperate, drop Q7's discussion and deliver its answer in 60 seconds; do not drop the honest distinction between sign and substance.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, your word does not return to you empty. Tonight you show us a man you made responsible for speaking and not for results. Give us ears to hear hard things, courage to say true things, and the humility to leave outcomes in your hands. We ask this through Christ our Lord, the Word made flesh. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. Tell us about a warning someone once gave you that you did not want to hear. Did you listen, and what happened?

W2. Have you ever had to deliver news you knew someone did not want? What was the hardest part, saying it, or living with how they took it?

Both questions are loading tonight's central distinction, duty versus outcome, without naming it. Let the stories breathe.

Read

Read aloud

This is a long passage, so use four readers and keep it moving: Reader 1 takes 3:16-27 (the watchman and the silencing), Reader 2 takes 4:1-8 (the brick and the bed), Reader 3 takes 4:9-17 (the rations), Reader 4 takes 5:1-12 (the hair and the sentence). Then you as leader summarize 5:13-17 in a sentence or two rather than reading it. Ask the group to note anything that strikes them as strange; strangeness is tonight's doorway.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The Watchman (3:16-27)

1. Look again at 3:17-19. What is the one thing God actually commands the watchman to do? And what outcomes does God explicitly leave outside the watchman's job description?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. What is Ezekiel told to do?

Depth. Why might it be mercy, and not just bookkeeping, for God to separate the duty to warn from the power to convert?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The command is single and clear: hear the word from God's mouth and give warning from him. That is the entire

duty. What is not in the job description: whether the wicked man listens, whether he turns, whether he lives. In verse 19, if the watchman warns and the man does not turn, the man dies in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life. The watchman is measured entirely on faithfulness, never on results. Notice too that the word comes from God's mouth, not the watchman's opinions; he passes on a warning, he does not invent one.

2. Verses 18-21 lay out four scenarios like a lawyer. Chart them together: in each case, who is warned or not warned, who lives or dies, and at whose hand is the blood required?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Case one: wicked man, not warned, he dies in his sin, and his blood is required at the watchman's hand. Case two: wicked man, warned, does not turn, he dies, and the watchman has saved his own life. Case three: a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, no warning given, he dies, and again his blood is on the watchman. Do not skip the hardest clause in verse 20, 'and I lay a stumbling block before him.' The Church has never defined it; the reading most consistent with the rest of Scripture is the same judicial permission we will meet at 14:9, God permitting a man already turning to meet the consequences of his own turning, never God authoring the sin. If someone raises it, say that plainly and say that it is a permitted reading and not a settled one. Case four: the righteous man is warned, takes the warning, and lives, and the watchman lives too. The pattern under all four: the message is the watchman's responsibility; the response never is. And the blood language is not decoration; God is saying that culpable silence is a form of participation in someone's ruin.

Dig Deeper

The Catechism carries this exact logic: CCC 1868 says we share responsibility for others' sins when we fail to disclose or hinder them despite a real obligation, and CCC 1829 names fraternal correction as a demand of charity itself.

3. Verse 20 says a righteous man can turn from his righteousness, die in his sin, and his righteous deeds shall not be remembered. Before we react, let's hear the strongest version of a reading many serious Christians hold.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Many Reformed Christians would say: this cannot mean a truly righteous person can be finally lost. Jesus says of his sheep that no one shall snatch them out of his hand (John 10:28), and John writes of apostates that they went out from us because they were not of us (1 John 2:19). And they would not rest the case on that alone. Ezekiel's righteous man, they would say, is righteous in the covenantal and external sense the Old Testament often uses, a member of the visible covenant people whose standing is not the same thing as saving regeneration; the death threatened through this whole section is covenantal and temporal, the death of the exile and the sword, not a verdict on his eternal destiny; and the warning itself is one of the ordinary means by which God preserves those who are truly his, so that the elect persevere precisely by heeding warnings like this one. On that reading the passage is fully serious and still teaches nothing about losing saving grace. And it protects something precious: assurance, the confidence that salvation rests on God's grip, not on my fragile grip on God.

Answering from the text. Feel the strength of that, especially its pastoral instinct; assurance matters, and salvation really does rest on God's initiative. But now read verse 20 with the text's own seriousness. God calls the man righteous, speaks of his righteous deeds which he has done, and describes a real turn, a real fall, a real death. Take the three distinctions in order. Covenantal righteousness is a real category, and it is why this argument cannot

be settled from one verse; what the verse gives us is a man God himself calls righteous, with righteous deeds he has done, who really turns and really dies. Temporal death is likewise real in Ezekiel, and chapter 18 will push the same language past the merely temporal when it sets life and death before each soul. And on warnings as a means of perseverance, note what that reading costs: God stakes blood-guilt on warnings whose outcome is already fixed, which strains the plain force of the passage even if it does not break it. The whole watchman structure assumes that warnings can change real outcomes for real people in both directions. The Catholic reading holds both truths the objection tries to protect and the text insists on: grace is entirely God's gift and it can be truly received and then truly abandoned. The Council of Trent teaches that grace really given is really lost through grave sin (Decree on Justification, Session 7). Ezekiel does not define the state of the righteous man, and the passage should not be made to; what can be said is that this Catholic reading takes the text's own seriousness at face value, and exactly why the Church keeps a confessional and not just a certificate.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The text presents the man's righteousness as genuine and his fall as real, which is why the warning matters and why blood attaches to silence. The Catholic position: grace is pure gift, truly received, and truly losable through grave sin, and therefore the life of grace is a lived fidelity, sustained by the sacraments, not a one-time transaction. Assurance, rightly understood, rests on God's proven fidelity, not on a guarantee that my freedom has been switched off.

4. Now the strangest turn of the night so far: 3:22-27. God has just appointed a watchman, and immediately ties him up in his house and makes him mute. Why would God silence the very man he just told to speak?

Take it as far as the room wants

Ground. What might it feel like to be given a message and forbidden to add your own spin to it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Look at the release valve in verse 27: but when I speak with you, I will open your mouth. Ezekiel is not silenced instead of being a watchman; he is silenced into being a pure one. He may speak only what God gives, when God gives it, with nothing of his own added, no commentary, no small talk, no freelance rebukes. Scholars debate whether the muteness was total between oracles or a restriction to God's words only; both readings agree on the point, that this mouth now belongs to God. And the silence itself preaches: a people who would not listen now get a prophet who cannot chat. Also notice verse 23: the glory of the LORD stood there, like the glory he saw by the Chebar. Keep an eye on that glory; and keep an eye on that phrase about the opened mouth. The book is not done with either.

The Brick and the Bed (4:1-17)

5. Chapter 4 opens with what looks like a child's game: a brick, a model siege, an iron plate. In Babylon, clay was the empire's paper; everything from contracts to city maps was pressed into it. So what is God publishing on this brick, and what might the iron plate between Ezekiel and the little city mean?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God is publishing Jerusalem's fate on Babylon's own writing material, in public, before it happens, so that no one can later call it bad luck. The siege works, the mound, the camps, the battering rams, say: this is coming and it is deliberate. The iron plate is the most fearful piece. It stands between the prophet, who is acting God's part, and the city: something hard and impassable now separates God's face from Jerusalem, and it was built by her sin, not his indifference. Verse 3 gives the genre label for everything tonight: this is a sign for the house of Israel. God has moved from sending words to staging them.

Live discovery

Split into pairs. Turn to Acts 20:26-28, St. Paul's farewell to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus. Find two things: the phrase that comes straight out of tonight's passage, and what Paul says he did that lets him use it. Then look at verse 28 and answer: who does the charge pass to next?

Let them find it. Acts 20:26-28

6. The watchman's charge sounds like it belongs to one strange prophet in one strange century. Let's test that. Centuries later, a missionary says goodbye to a church he loves, knowing he will never see them again, and he reaches for exactly this language.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Paul declares that he is innocent of the blood of all of them, and gives the reason: he did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God. That is Ezekiel's grammar exactly, blood and warning, innocence purchased only by faithful speech. Paul read Ezekiel 3 as his own job description. Then verse 28 hands the watch to the overseers God has set over the flock: the watchman's office did not retire with the prophets; it was folded into the pastoral office of the Church, and by extension into every baptized person with someone in their care. The charge in tonight's passage is, in a real sense, addressed to this room.

7. In 4:4-6 Ezekiel is told to lie on his side and bear the punishment of the house of Israel, a day for each year. He is not guilty of those years. What can one innocent man lying there actually accomplish, and what might it point toward?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

By itself, nothing juridical: Ezekiel's bearing is a sign, not an atonement. He makes the invisible visible, the sheer accumulated weight of the people's sin, measured out day by day on one man's body, so that no one can pretend the debt is small. But the gesture points beyond itself. Israel's Scriptures will speak of a Servant on whom the LORD lays the iniquity of us all, and the New Testament will say of Christ that he bore our sins in his body. The clean formulation to give the group: Ezekiel carries the sign; Christ carries the substance. Be careful not to collapse the two, because the difference is the gospel.

Dig Deeper

Read Isaiah 53:4-6 and 1 Peter 2:24 side by side with Ezekiel 4:4-6. What can the Servant do that the prophet cannot?

8. Read 4:9-17 again, especially the exchange in verses 14-15. The rations dramatize the siege, but something else happens in that exchange. Ezekiel objects to one detail of the command, and God responds. What does that little dialogue reveal about God?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The rations preach scarcity, about eight ounces of mongrel bread and a splash of water a day, siege food, eaten with trembling; and the unclean cooking fuel preaches exile, bread made unclean among the nations. But the exchange is the treasure. Ezekiel protests from conscience that he has never defiled himself, and God adjusts the sign: cow's dung instead. The God who commands hard things is not deaf to the man he commands. He hears a servant's conscience and bends the assignment without abandoning it. Anyone in the room who thinks obedience to God means the death of dialogue with God has just watched the counterexample.

Dig Deeper

Centuries later another man on a rooftop objects to a command about unclean food in almost the same words. Read Acts 10:14 next to Ezekiel 4:14 and enjoy the echo, then notice how differently the two scenes resolve, and why.

The Hair and the Verdict (5:1-17)

9. In 5:1-4 the prophet's own hair becomes the population of Jerusalem. Trace the fate of each third. Then look closely at verse 3: what happens there, and why might that small detail matter?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. What do the three thirds stand for?

Depth. Why does God so often work through a remnant rather than a majority?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A third burned in the city, plague and famine inside the walls; a third struck with the sword around it; a third scattered to the wind with a sword unsheathed after them. Verses 12 and following decode it explicitly. But verse 3: a few hairs, taken and bound in the skirt of the garment. A small remnant, kept close, carried on the prophet's own body. Even from those, verse 4 says, some go into the fire; the remnant is not a loophole, it is a mercy. Hold onto that image of the few kept in the hem. This book has plans for the remnant.

10. Verse 5 gives the verdict its ground: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations. Read 5:5-8. Why is Jerusalem judged more severely than the nations around her, and what does that tell us about privilege in God's economy?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Jerusalem was placed at the center on purpose, elected to be a display of God's ways to the nations, and she used the position to out-rebel the pagans (verses 6-7 say she was more turbulent than the nations around her). Election never lowered the stakes; it raised them. This principle runs straight through the Bible: to whom much is given, much will be required (Luke 12:48), and judgment begins with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17). For a Catholic room this lands close to home: sacraments, Scripture, and two thousand years of teaching are not a cushion. They are a

commission, and tonight's whole passage is about what happens when the commissioned go quiet.

Putting It Together

11. Last question. Go back through the night and count: how many ways has God used Ezekiel's body as the message? What is God telling Israel, and us, about how he communicates?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

At least five: his mouth (shut, then opened only for God's words), his posture (bound in his house, lying on his side), his side bearing the measured years, his diet (siege rations, eaten in public), and his hair (shaved, weighed, divided). The word of God is not floating above the world as pure information; it takes hold of flesh and preaches through it. That is the instinct behind the whole sacramental life of the Church, where God still insists on reaching spirits through bodies, water, oil, bread, hands. And it points toward the moment the pattern was made perfect, when the message and the messenger became one person. Ezekiel is a signpost on that road. Send the group home with the question the passage leaves open: if God's messengers preach with their bodies and their lives, what is my life currently preaching?

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Is there someone in your life you have been staying silent with, not out of gentleness, but out of fear? What would a faithful, loving warning even look like there?

S2. If your friends could only read your life this month, not hear your words, what would it be telling them about God?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Choose one honest conversation you have been avoiding and take one concrete step toward it this week: schedule the coffee, write the message, or, if the moment is truly not right, write out what you would say and pray it daily until it is.
2. Make an examination of conscience one evening with a single question: what warning from God, through Scripture, a homily, a friend, or my own conscience, have I been politely ignoring? If it points to something serious, bring it to confession this week.
3. Once this week, eat one deliberately plain, simple meal, and while you eat it, pray for people in exile today: refugees, the imprisoned, anyone far from home, and for the courage to speak truth in love.
4. Memorize Ezekiel 3:17 and say it each morning as a question: whom has God set me to watch over today?

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 3:17

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me."

Ezekiel 3:17

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you made a man's silence, his posture, his bread, and his hair into your word. Make our lives legible. Where you have given us someone to warn, give us courage and gentleness in equal measure, and free us from the tyranny of results, for the outcomes belong to you. Bind us like the hairs in the hem of your garment, and keep us close through every fire. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 3:16-27** watchman charge; binding and muteness
- **Ezekiel 4:1-17** brick, iron plate, lying on sides, rations
- **Ezekiel 5:1-17** hair sign; verdict on Jerusalem

Watchman background (leader reference)

- **Jeremiah 6:17**
- **Habakkuk 2:1**
- **Isaiah 62:6**

Discovery

- **Acts 20:26-28** Paul's Miletus farewell; the charge passes to the Church's overseers

Dig Deeper and supporting

- **Isaiah 53:4-6** the Servant bears iniquity really
- **1 Peter 2:24** he bore our sins in his body
- **Acts 10:14** Peter's echo of Ezekiel 4:14
- **Luke 12:48** much given, much required
- **1 Peter 4:17** judgment begins with the household of God
- **John 10:28; 1 John 2:19** texts cited in the steelman objection

Sign-act genre (leader reference)

- **Isaiah 20:1-4**
- **Jeremiah 13:1-11**
- **Jeremiah 19:1-13**
- **Hosea 1:2-9**

Terms

- ***tsopheh***. watchman, sentry; the one posted to see danger far off and sound the warning
- ***ben adam***. son of man; God's constant address to Ezekiel, stressing his creatureliness
- ***oth***. sign; the label 4:3 puts on the brick, and on the whole embodied sermon

Catechism

- **CCC 1146**. spiritual realities through bodily signs
- **CCC 1829**. fraternal correction as a demand of charity
- **CCC 1868**. responsibility for others' sins through culpable silence
- **CCC 2447**. instructing and advising as spiritual works of mercy

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 4. The Glory Walks Out

Reading: Ezekiel 8-11

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group traces the glory's slow, staged departure from the temple step by step and finds the shocking promise buried inside it, that God himself has been a sanctuary to the exiles (11:16).

Catholic Touchstone

God's presence is not abolished when a holy place is lost; it is deepened and relocated in him, which is the seed of the Incarnation, the indwelling of grace, and the tabernacle lamp.

Tonight is the darkest hour of the book so far, and also the first flash of its gospel. Ezekiel is carried in vision from his house in Babylon to the temple in Jerusalem, given a guided tour of four escalating abominations, and then made to watch the unthinkable: the *kabod*, the glory that filled Solomon's temple on its dedication day, gets up and leaves. But it leaves strangely, in stages, pausing at every threshold, and it stops on the mountain east of the city. Before it goes, God says two things nobody in Jerusalem or Babylon expected: he marks the foreheads of everyone who grieves over the sin, and he tells the exiles that he himself has been their sanctuary in the lands where they were scattered. Let the group feel the weight of the departure before they find the promise. The promise only lands if the loss lands first.

What You Need to Know

Where and when we are

Ezekiel 8:1 dates the vision to the sixth year, commonly reckoned as September of 592 BC, about fourteen months after the throne vision of chapter 1. Ezekiel is sitting in his own house in Babylon with the elders of the exiles in front of him when the hand of the Lord falls on him. He is then transported to Jerusalem *in visions of God* (8:3). He does not physically travel; the text is explicit that this is visionary sight, and at 11:24 the vision returns him to Chaldea and he tells the exiles everything. That framing matters: the exiles in Babylon are being shown, in real time, what is actually happening inside the temple hundreds of miles away, and why.

The four abominations of chapter 8

The tour has four stops, each introduced with the refrain that Ezekiel will see still greater abominations, and each stop is closer to the heart of the sanctuary.

- **The image of jealousy** (8:5-6), an idol statue at the north gate. Many scholars connect it with the Asherah image Manasseh once set up in the temple (2 Kings 21:7); the text does not name it, so hold that identification loosely.
- **The dark room** (8:7-13): seventy elders, the leadership class, burning incense to carved images behind a hidden door, each telling himself that the LORD does not see and has forsaken the land.

- **The women weeping for Tammuz** (8:14-15). Tammuz is the Mesopotamian deity Dumuzi, a dying vegetation god mourned in summertime rites. Grief that belongs to the true God is being spent on a fertility cult.
- **The twenty-five men** (8:16-18) standing between the porch and the altar, the most sacred courtyard real estate in Israel, with their backs to the temple and their faces to the rising sun. The text does not say who they are; their position suggests men who ministered there. Posture is theology: they have physically turned around.

The grammar of glory

Kabod carries a range in the Old Testament, from honour and weight to visible splendour. In Ezekiel's temple visions it is the second: the visible weight of God's own presence, and it has a history of arrivals. It descended on Sinai, it filled the tabernacle so that Moses could not enter (Exodus 40:34-35), and it filled Solomon's temple on its dedication day so that the priests could not stand to minister (1 Kings 8:10-11). Ezekiel 10:4, where the cloud fills the house and the court glows, is deliberately written in the language of those dedications, which makes what follows an un-dedication. Watch how the movement is staged: from the cherub to the threshold (9:3, dwelt on again at 10:4), from the threshold to above the cherubim (10:18), to the door of the east gate where it stops (10:19), and finally up from the midst of the city to the mountain on the east side (11:23). A later Jewish tradition counted the stages of the Presence's withdrawal and read them as reluctance, the Presence lingering in hope of repentance; the ten journeys of the Shekhinah are set out at *b. Rosh Hashanah* 31a, and the Presence going with Israel into exile at *b. Megillah* 29a. Verify the loci before you cite them aloud, and if you cannot, say only that the tradition exists. Whatever one makes of that tradition, the staged structure is on the page itself.

A sanctuary in small measure

The hinge of the whole session is 11:16. The Hebrew phrase is *miqdash me'at*, and it carries real ambiguity: the RSV renders it a sanctuary 'for a while,' a temporary arrangement; many other translations render it 'a little sanctuary' or a sanctuary 'in some measure.' Either way the word is *miqdash*, the temple word, and either way the phrase leans forward, a provisional gift pointing to something fuller. Later Jewish tradition, often cited from the Talmud, heard in this verse a foundation for the synagogue, the little sanctuary of the scattered. One more thing: at 11:19-20 God promises one heart, a new spirit, and a heart of flesh in place of stone. That promise belongs to a much later session in its full form. Tonight, name it in a single sentence and file it away. Do not unpack it, and do not let an eager participant unpack it either.

Reading the room

Two pastoral cautions. First, some people in your circle have lived a version of this chapter: a parish that closed, a church that hurt them, a season when God seemed to have moved out. The promise of 11:16 is for exactly those people; make sure the session ends there and not at the departure. Second, chapter 9 contains a visionary slaughter that includes women and children, and someone may rightly find it disturbing. Do not wave it away; see the objection bench, be honest about what remains hard, and keep the group's eyes on what the vision itself puts first, which is the mark of mercy.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Eastward out of Eden

When Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden, God stations cherubim at the east of Eden (Genesis 3:24). In Ezekiel, the glory leaves accompanied by cherubim, through the east gate, to a mountain in the

east. Many readers, ancient and modern, have heard the echo: the temple was built to be a new Eden, and its defilement replays the first expulsion, except that this time it is God who goes out through the eastern door. Be precise about where 11:23 leaves him: on the mountain east of the city, not in Babylon. The promise to the exiles is 11:16, that God has himself been a sanctuary to them in the countries where they have gone. Present the Eden echo as a reading the text richly invites rather than as a stated equation.

Every arrival reversed

Set 10:4 beside Exodus 40:34-35 and 1 Kings 8:10-11 and the group can see the reversal for themselves: the same cloud, the same overwhelming brightness, but this time on its way out. Ezekiel writes the departure in dedication language so that no one can mistake what is being undone.

The Word pitched his tent

The New Testament completes tonight's motion in two directions at once. The mark on the foreheads of the mourners returns as the seal on the foreheads of God's servants in Revelation 7 and as his name on their foreheads in Revelation 22. And the glory that stood on the mountain east of the city stands there again in the Gospels: Jesus descends the Mount of Olives, sees Jerusalem, and weeps over it (Luke 19:37-44), and warns that the house is being left forsaken (Matthew 23:38, in substance). John 1:14 gives the deepest fulfillment of 11:16: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, where the verb is *eskenosen*, he pitched his tent. God's final answer to a defiled temple is not placelessness but a Presence with a face. For your own horizon, not for tonight's discussion: Revelation 21:22 says the new Jerusalem has no temple because its temple is the Lord God and the Lamb, which is 11:16 grown to full stature. The book will get there; do not get there ahead of it.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Jerome, d. 420

Commenting on the mark of chapter 9, Jerome reports that in the ancient Hebrew script the last letter of the alphabet, taw, was written in the shape of a cross, and he reads the marking of the mourners' foreheads as a figure of the sign of the cross that Christians trace on their own foreheads: the ones set apart for mercy carry, centuries in advance, the shape of Calvary.

Commentary on Ezekiel, on Ezekiel 9:4. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Every time someone in the room signs their forehead at the Gospel, they are standing in Ezekiel 9 among the marked.

St. Augustine, d. 430

You were more inward than my most inward part, and higher than my highest.

Confessions III.6.11.

For the group. The exiles are about to learn what Augustine learned in his own wandering: the God they thought they had left behind in a building was nearer to them than their own hearts.

St. Thomas Aquinas, d. 1274

St. Thomas teaches that God is in all things, and intimately, by his essence, presence, and power, because he gives and

sustains their very being at every moment; but beyond this common presence there is a special one. In those who know and love him, God is present by grace, and he does not merely visit them but dwells in them as in a temple.

Summa Theologiae I, q. 8, a. 3, with q. 43, a. 3. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Ezekiel 11:16 is the Old Testament seed of that second presence: God does not just accompany the exiles into Babylon, he begins to promise that he himself will be their sanctuary.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 586. Far from being hostile to the Temple, Jesus identified himself with it, presenting himself as God's definitive dwelling place among men.

CCC 1179. The worship of the New Covenant is not tied exclusively to any one place. (For Christ as the true temple see CCC 1197 below; for believers as living stones, 1 Peter 2:5.)

CCC 1197. Christ is the true temple of God, the place where his glory dwells, and by grace Christians too become temples of the Holy Spirit.

CCC 1296. The seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ and our enrollment in his service.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Follow the glory (develop). This is the thread's darkest night. Chart the four stations visibly (whiteboard or large paper) and leave the chart up. The glory ends the evening standing on the mountain east of the city. Do not hint at whether it ever comes back, and do not mention the east gate's future. Let the departure sit unresolved.

The LORD is there (develop). 11:16 is the first seed of the answer: the LORD is there, in Babylon of all places. Underline the verse tonight; the title of the study is quietly beginning to earn itself.

The hairs in the hem (develop). The remnant bound in Ezekiel's hem in 5:3 gets faces tonight: the marked mourners of chapter 9. Connect it explicitly in the question 3 debrief; the group planted this and deserves the payoff.

Son of man (develop). Light touch only. God keeps addressing Ezekiel as son of man throughout the vision, one mortal walking through the wreckage of the house. Just keep the phrase audible when you read.

The heart of stone (plant). New thread, planted at 11:19-20 with question 10. One sentence, filed away, deliberately unresolved. It pays off much later in the study; if anyone pushes, smile and say the book will come back to it.

Sealed guess (develop). Do not mention the sealed guesses aloud, but tonight hands the group enormous evidence: the glory has left the building and God has called himself the exiles' sanctuary. Expect some visible recalculating. Say nothing.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Chapter 9 shows executioners sent through the city striking down old men, women, and children (9:5-6). How can that be the same God who takes no pleasure in the death of anyone?

Do not soften what is written, and do not pretend it is easy. Three honest things can be said. First, this is a prophetic vision of judgment, cast in the stylized war rhetoric of its age; the Church has long allowed that such scenes teach the deadly seriousness of sin without functioning as newsreel. Second, notice what the vision itself insists on putting

first: before a single blow falls, God marks for mercy everyone who so much as grieves, and the criterion is astonishingly low, a sigh. Judgment in this vision is not indiscriminate; it is what remains when mercy has gone looking door to door. Third, judgment begins at the sanctuary with the elders (9:6), the leaders who knew best, which is the opposite of scapegoating the weak. And it remains hard. Say so. Ezekiel himself falls on his face and cries out in protest (9:8), and the text keeps his protest in. So can we.

Did Ezekiel actually travel to Jerusalem, or is this all in his head, and if it is a vision, why should it count as evidence of anything?

The text answers the first half itself: he is lifted up 'in visions of God' (8:3) and returned to Chaldea 'in the vision' (11:24). He never physically leaves Babylon. But 'vision' in Scripture does not mean imagination or dream logic; it means God showing a prophet what is really the case from a vantage point no human has. What the exiles could check was the outcome: the fall of the city Ezekiel announced. Scripture does not give us independent confirmation of each hidden practice he was shown inside the temple, and the guide should not claim it does. A vision is not less than evidence; it is testimony, and the part of this testimony that could be tested was vindicated.

Session Goals

1. Walk the four scenes of Ezekiel 8 and see that the corruption is at the center, led by the leadership, and moving inward.
2. Discover that before judgment moves, God marks for mercy everyone who grieves over sin, and find where that mark reappears in Revelation.
3. Chart the glory's staged departure and register both its reality and its strange, lingering pace.
4. Identify the mountain where the glory stops and discover who stands on that same mountain in the Gospels.
5. Find the promise of 11:16 for themselves: God himself a sanctuary to the exiles, and feel how completely it reverses the theology of the people left in Jerusalem.
6. Hear the strongest form of the 'no sacred places' objection and answer it from the text, granting what is true in it.
7. Plant the heart-of-flesh promise of 11:19 in a single sentence, unresolved.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

At full length this runs 90 minutes: Win 10, reading plan 15, questions 1-2 on chapter 8 about 12, questions 3-4 on the mark about 15, questions 5-6 on the glory about 15, questions 7-9 on the sanctuary promise and the steelman about 15, question 10 in 3, Send and Live It 8, closing prayer 2. The cuts below bring it to 75 in order.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Revelation 22:3-4 half of the mark discovery and keep only Revelation 7:2-4.
2. Cut all Dig Deeper boxes (Psalm 94, 1 Kings 8, 1 Peter 4).
3. Fold question 2 into the debrief of question 1; the elders' sentence in 8:12 can be handled in two minutes there.
4. For the second discovery, give the group Zechariah 14:4 yourself in one sentence and send them only to Luke 19:37-41.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you see everything: the public square and the locked room, the altar and the hidden wall. Tonight you are going to show us hard things about your house, and maybe about our hearts. Give us the grace of the marked ones, to grieve what grieves you instead of making peace with it. And when the glory begins to move, do not let us look away. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. Have you ever gone back to a place that used to feel like home and found it was not anymore? What was that like?

W2. Tell us about a time someone stayed with you, or went with you, when they did not have to.

Both questions are quietly aimed at homesickness and companionship. Do not connect them to Ezekiel yet; the text will do it by the end of the night.

Read

Read aloud

Four chapters is too much to read straight through, so read it as four movements. One reader takes Ezekiel 8:1-18, the tour. A second reads 9:1-11, the mark. Then, for the departure, have a single unhurried voice read the four stations in sequence, 9:3, then 10:3-5, then 10:18-19, then 11:22-23, with a beat of silence between each; the pacing is the point, so ask them to read slowly. A fourth reader finishes with 11:14-21.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The tour of the house (Ezekiel 8)

1. God gives Ezekiel a guided tour with four stops: 8:5-6, 8:7-13, 8:14-15, and 8:16-18. Name what he sees at each stop. Then look at the route: what direction is the tour moving, and what do the four stops have in common?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The stops: an idol statue, the image of jealousy, at the north gate; seventy elders burning incense to carved images in a hidden room; women weeping for Tammuz, a Mesopotamian god mourned in summer rites; and twenty-five men between the porch and the altar with their backs to the temple, worshiping the rising sun. The route moves inward, from the outer gate toward the altar itself, and each stop is announced as a still greater abomination. The corruption is not seeping in from the edges; it is worst at the center, and it is led by the leadership, elders and men of standing.

The last image says it all without a word: backs to God, faces to something else.

2. In the dark room, the elders say two sentences to themselves (8:12). What are they, and why might this be the most revealing verse in the chapter?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They say 'The LORD does not see us' and 'the LORD has forsaken the land.' The irony is double. They say God cannot see them while God is showing Ezekiel every hidden brushstroke on their walls; and they treat an absence they invented as permission, as if God's supposed departure made anything allowed. And there is a tragedy coiled inside it: by the end of chapter 11 their sentence comes true, in reverse. The LORD does forsake the temple, not because he could not see, but because of what he saw.

Dig Deeper

Psalm 94:7-9 answers the elders directly: 'He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?' Worth thirty seconds if the group is moving well.

The mark (Ezekiel 9)

3. Before any judgment falls, two things happen first (9:3-4). What are they? Look closely at who receives the mark: what, exactly, qualifies a person for it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

First the glory moves, its first step, from the cherub to the threshold. Then a man clothed in linen is sent to put a mark on the foreheads of all who 'sigh and groan' over the abominations of the city. The qualification is not distance or purity; the marked ones still live in that city and worshiped at that temple. What sets them apart is grief. Sin still grieves them; they have refused to make peace with it. Mercy goes out door to door before judgment moves at all. And notice where judgment starts when it does move: 'begin at my sanctuary' (9:6), with the elders, the people who knew best. One more thing: we have met these marked ones before. They are the handful of hairs Ezekiel bound in the hem of his garment in 5:3, the remnant, and tonight they get faces.

Dig Deeper

Many commentators hear Ezekiel 9:6 behind 1 Peter 4:17, that judgment begins with the household of God. Send a fast reader there if you have two spare minutes.

Live discovery

Split the room in two. One half finds Revelation 7:2-4 and reports: what is put on foreheads, when, and by whom? The other half finds Revelation 22:3-4 and reports what is on foreheads at the very end of the Bible.

Let them find it. Revelation 7:2-4; Revelation 22:3-4

4. This mark does not stay in Ezekiel. Where does Scripture pick it up again?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

In Revelation 7, before the four winds of judgment are released, God's servants are sealed on their foreheads, mercy marked before judgment moves, exactly Ezekiel's sequence. In Revelation 22, in the city at the end of everything, his servants see his face and his name is on their foreheads. John's sealing imagery strongly echoes Ezekiel 9, and it tells us where the mark is going: alongside it stands the name on the forehead, and the face-to-face. This is the moment to share St. Jerome's observation from the leader guide about the shape of the ancient letter *taw*.

The glory walks out (Ezekiel 9-11)

5. Now track every movement of the glory through the vision: 9:3, 10:4, 10:18-19, and 11:22-23. Chart the stations in order. What do you notice about the pace, and about the route?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Just list the four stops in order and put them on the board.

Ground. Why stages and pauses rather than a single exit? What does the pacing do to you as a reader?

Depth. Compare 10:4 with 1 Kings 8:10-11. What is Ezekiel deliberately reversing, and why write it that way?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The stations: from the cherub to the threshold (9:3, and the text returns to dwell there at 10:4, where the cloud fills the house exactly as it did on dedication day); from the threshold to a position above the cherubim (10:18); with the cherubim to the door of the east gate, where they stop (10:19); and finally up from the midst of the city to the mountain on the east side (11:23). It does not vanish and it does not flee. It withdraws in stages, pausing at every threshold, and the text slows down the way a person slows down leaving somewhere they love. That impression of reluctance is a reading, not a verse, but the staged structure inviting it is right there on the page. And the route runs east: out the east gate, to the eastern mountain.

Dig Deeper

Set 10:4 beside 1 Kings 8:10-11 and Exodus 40:34-35: the same cloud, the same unbearable brightness, written in dedication language so we cannot miss that a dedication is being reversed. And Genesis 3:24: cherubim, and the east side of Eden. Some in your group will find that echo on their own; enjoy it when they do.

Live discovery

Half the room: find Zechariah 14:4 and name the mountain east of Jerusalem. The other half: turn to Luke 19:37-41 and report who is standing on that mountain, what he sees, and what he does.

Let them find it. Zechariah 14:4; Luke 19:37-41

6. The glory stops 'upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city' (11:23). Ezekiel never names that mountain. Let's find out what it is, and who stands on it later.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Zechariah names it: the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east. And in Luke, centuries after Ezekiel, Jesus comes down the descent of the Mount of Olives, catches sight of the city, and weeps over it. The mountain east of the city in Ezekiel 11 is traditionally identified with the Mount of Olives; the glory that paused there, as if looking back at the house it was leaving, and the Christ who comes down that same descent weeping over the city are worth holding side by side. Leave that observation exactly there. Say nothing about what happens next in Ezekiel.

A sanctuary in Babylon (Ezekiel 11:14-21)

7. While all this is happening, what are the people still living in Jerusalem saying about the exiles (11:15)? What is the theology underneath their sentence?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They are saying of the exiles: 'They have gone far from the LORD; to us this land is given for a possession.' Underneath is what we might call proximity theology: nearness to the building equals nearness to God, and catastrophe equals abandonment. We kept the temple, so we are the faithful ones; you lost everything, so God is done with you. The vision we have just watched demolishes both halves. The people beside the temple are the ones driving the glory out, and the glory first appeared, back in chapter 1, to an exile standing by an irrigation canal in Babylon.

8. Now read 11:16 slowly, twice. What does God say he has been to the exiles, and where? Why might this be the most shocking sentence in the whole vision?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He says that though he scattered them among the countries, he himself has been a sanctuary to them in the countries where they have gone. The word is *miqdash*, the temple word. While the building in Jerusalem fills up with idols, God has been being the sanctuary, personally, in Babylon. The Hebrew phrase, *miqdash me'at*, can be read 'a sanctuary for a while' (as our translation has it) or 'a little sanctuary,' a sanctuary in small measure; the Church does not settle the point and both readings say something true. Either way the phrase leans forward: a provisional gift, pointing at something fuller. The exiles thought distance from the temple meant distance from God. God's answer is that he moved with them, and moved first.

9. Let's take the strongest objection this chapter can generate, and take it seriously: was the temple, and everything like it, a mistake all along?

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Here is the case at full strength. Ezekiel 8-11 proves that tying God's presence to a building, an object, or a consecrated place was always a misunderstanding waiting to be corrected. The glory leaves the temple, and God announces that he himself is the sanctuary. Stephen picks up this very trajectory when he says the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands (Acts 7:48), and Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that true worshipers will worship neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24). If that is where the story is going, then Catholic practice walks it backwards: consecrated buildings, a tabernacle with a lamp, a Presence you genuflect to in one place and not in another. Ezekiel's God cannot be evicted precisely

because he was never a resident.

Answering from the text. Start by granting everything true in that, because a good deal of it is true and the Church teaches it. God is not contained by buildings; Solomon said so at the temple's own dedication, that heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain him (1 Kings 8:27), and the Catechism says plainly that New Covenant worship is not tied exclusively to any one place (CCC 1179). If the objection were only 'God is bigger than architecture,' Ezekiel and the Church answer amen together. But now look at what the text actually does. The glory does not evaporate into a principle. It moves: cherub, threshold, gate, mountain, a Presence with a location at every step, and grief at every pause. God's complaint in chapter 8 is not that people wrongly believed he was really there; it is that they defiled the place where he really was. And his promise in 11:16 is not 'there shall be no sanctuaries,' it is 'I have been a sanctuary.' The category is kept and filled with himself. Then watch where the New Testament takes it: 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14), where John's verb is *eskenosen*, he pitched his tent. God's answer to a defiled temple is not placelessness; it is a truer localization, presence in a Body you could touch, in one town and not another. That is the pattern a tabernacle with a lamp continues. It is not the story walked backwards; it is what the story looks like after the glory takes flesh.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The objection is right that God is never confined to a building, and the Church says so as loudly as anyone. But Ezekiel does not abolish the sanctuary; God fills the category with himself, and the New Testament concentrates that presence rather than dissolving it: the Word pitches his tent among us. Locatable, touchable presence is God's chosen answer to the defiled temple, not the error it corrects.

10. One last thing, quickly. Just before the glory leaves the city, what does God promise to do inside people (11:19-20)? Don't unpack it; just name it and file it away.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He promises to give them one heart, to put a new spirit within them, to take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they will actually walk in his ways. Tonight it is one verse in passing, spoken while the moving truck is practically running. File it. The book is not done with it.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. The elders in the dark room told themselves, 'The LORD does not see us.' Where in your own life are you most tempted to live as if that were true?

S2. Who do you know who is in some kind of exile right now, far from home, far from the Church, far from who they used to be? What would change for them if they believed God had moved toward them first?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Make one visit this week to a church or adoration chapel outside of Mass. Sit near the tabernacle for ten minutes

and read Ezekiel 11:16 there. Notice the lamp.

2. Each morning, trace the sign of the cross on your forehead, slowly, and remember whose mark it is and who qualified for it in Ezekiel 9: the ones who still grieve over sin.

3. Name one 'dark room' of your own, a habit or corner of life you run as if God does not see. Bring it into the light in prayer this week, and if it belongs there, bring it to confession.

4. Reach out once, concretely, to someone in exile: a text, a call, or a visit to someone far from home or far from the Church.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 11:16

"Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone."

Ezekiel 11:16

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you did not stay where you were dishonored, but you did not go far. You crossed into exile ahead of your people and made yourself their sanctuary. Be that for us. Mark us with your cross, give us hearts that grieve what grieves you, and never let us mistake your patience for absence. We ask this through Christ our Lord, who wept over the city from the eastern hill. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 8:1-18** the tour of four abominations
- **Ezekiel 9:1-11** the mark and the judgment
- **Ezekiel 10:1-22** the glory at the threshold and the east gate
- **Ezekiel 11:1-25** the sanctuary promise; the glory to the mountain

The glory's stations (read by one voice, slowly)

- **Ezekiel 9:3**
- **Ezekiel 10:3-5**
- **Ezekiel 10:18-19**
- **Ezekiel 11:22-23**

Discovery passages

- **Revelation 7:2-4** sealed foreheads before judgment
- **Revelation 22:3-4** his name on their foreheads
- **Zechariah 14:4** names the mountain east of Jerusalem
- **Luke 19:37-41** Jesus weeps over the city from the Mount of Olives

Dig Deeper and steelman support

- **Psalm 94:7-9** answer to 'the LORD does not see'
- **1 Kings 8:10-11** the glory moving in, reversed by 10:4
- **Exodus 40:34-35** the cloud fills the tabernacle
- **Genesis 3:24** cherubim at the east of Eden
- **1 Peter 4:17** judgment begins with the household of God
- **1 Kings 8:27** heaven cannot contain him, said at the dedication
- **Acts 7:48** steelman source
- **John 4:21-24** steelman source
- **John 1:14** the Word pitched his tent

Terms

- ****kabod.**** glory; the visible weight and radiance of God's own presence
- ****taw.**** the last Hebrew letter, the mark of 9:4; cross-shaped in the ancient script
- ****miqdash me'at.**** the phrase behind 11:16; a sanctuary 'for a while' or 'in small measure'
- ****eskenosen.**** John 1:14, 'dwelt among us,' literally 'pitched his tent'

Catechism

- **CCC 586.** Jesus identifies himself with the Temple, God's definitive dwelling among men
- **CCC 1179.** New Covenant worship not tied exclusively to one place

- **CCC 1197.** Christ the true temple; Christians temples of the Spirit
- **CCC 1296.** the seal on the forehead marks belonging to Christ

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 5. Whitewash and Idols of the Heart

Reading: Ezekiel 12-14

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that the deadliest lies are the comfortable religious ones, and that idolatry has moved indoors, into the heart, before God ever names it in the temple.

Catholic Touchstone

The first commandment reaches the interior life: idolatry remains a constant temptation that relocates into the heart, and the Church's answer is interior conversion, not a fresh coat of religious paint.

Tonight covers three chapters that escalate in one direction: inward. Chapter 12 shows a people who can watch a prophet dig through his own wall and still shrug. Chapter 13 exposes the prophets who made that shrug possible by selling peace when there was no peace, whitewashing a wall nobody built properly. Chapter 14 lands the blow the whole session is built for: elders come to consult God, looking perfectly devout, and God says they have taken their idols into their hearts. In chapter 8 the idols were in the temple. By chapter 14 the temple of the idol is the man. Keep the room warm; this session names things people carry, and the aim is honest self-knowledge that leads toward repentance and the sacraments, never shame for its own sake.

What You Need to Know

Where we stand: the last years before the fall

Ezekiel's call came in 593 BC; Jerusalem will fall in 587/586. Chapters 12-14 sit inside that narrow window. The city is still standing, which is exactly the problem: its survival so far is being read as proof that the warnings are empty. The escape-baggage sign in 12:1-16 targets 'the prince in Jerusalem', King Zedekiah. The oracle says he will cover his face, be brought to Babylon, and yet not see it (12:12-13). The fulfillment is recorded in 2 Kings 25:7 and Jeremiah 52:11: Zedekiah was captured fleeing the city, blinded at Riblah, and then taken to Babylon in chains. He arrived in the land he never saw. Do not hand this to the group early; it lands harder if you hold it for the answer to question 1.

Jeremiah is preaching the same sermon

While Ezekiel confronts false prophets among the exiles, Jeremiah had preached against them inside Jerusalem in closely related terms: they heal the wound of the people lightly, crying peace when there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). Jeremiah 28 gives the false prophecy problem a face: Hananiah publicly contradicts Jeremiah, promises the exile will end within two years, breaks the wooden yoke off Jeremiah's neck as a sign, and is dead within the year. Two true prophets, hundreds of miles apart, giving one diagnosis, is strong evidence that the message came from somewhere other than either man's own spirit. The group will find the Jeremiah link themselves in the discovery; your job is to know the background.

Sign acts continue

Session 3 established that God makes Ezekiel's body the sermon. Chapter 12 continues the pattern: the packed baggage, the wall dug through at dusk, trembling while eating (12:17-20). A rebellious house has learned to filter speeches; it has not yet learned to filter a man carrying refugee luggage out of a hole in his own wall. Do not re-teach session 3's discovery as if new; just let the group notice the pattern holding.

Gillulim: Ezekiel's word for idols

Ezekiel has a favourite word for idols, *gillulim*, used dozens of times in the book and rare outside it. Many scholars suggest it is a deliberately coarse term, formed to sound like a word for dung; on that reading Ezekiel is refusing the idols even the dignity of a neutral noun. Treat the etymology as a common scholarly suggestion, not a certainty, but the contempt in the book's rhetoric is not in doubt.

Noah, Daniel, Job, and an honest question

In 14:14 and 14:20 God names three proverbially righteous men who could deliver only their own lives. Noah and Job are clear. 'Daniel' is genuinely debated: he may be Ezekiel's famous contemporary in the Babylonian court, or he may be an ancient sage of wider Near Eastern memory (a righteous Danel appears in texts from Ugarit, and the Hebrew spelling here differs slightly from the book of Daniel's). The Church has not ruled on this, and the passage's point is identical either way: three famous examples of righteousness, and even they could not cover this generation. Say so honestly if asked; manufactured certainty helps no one.

The hard verse: 14:9

Someone may catch 14:9, where God says that if a prophet is deceived, God himself has deceived that prophet. Do not dodge it and do not improvise; the objection bench below gives you the Church's frame. In short: Scripture often speaks of God's judgment in the idiom of God doing what he permits as a consequence of chosen sin, the same idiom as 'God gave them up' in Romans 1:24. God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, is not the author of the lie; he is the judge who lets a chosen lie ripen.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Standing in the breach

The charge in 13:5, that the prophets never went up into the breaches, reaches back to Moses. Psalm 106:23 says God would have destroyed Israel after the golden calf 'had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him' (see Exodus 32:11-14, 30-32, where Moses offers his own self for the people). That is what a true prophet does with a breach: he stands in it and takes the danger personally. Later in this book God will say he looked for a man to stand in the breach and found none (22:30). The line runs forward to Christ, the one intercessor who stands in the breach fully and forever (Hebrews 7:25). Hold this for the leader; the group gets the Moses connection through question 4.

From whitewashed walls to whitewashed tombs

The group's first discovery sends them to Matthew 23:27-28, which uses a strikingly related image, whitewashed tombs rather than a whitewashed wall, beautiful outside, full of death within, aimed at religious professionals. The image's survival across six centuries tells you the problem it names is not Babylonian; it is human.

Idolatry moves indoors, and stays there

Ezekiel 14:3 is the Old Testament's clearest statement that the first commandment is an interior commandment. The second discovery finds the apostles reading it exactly that way: Paul calls covetousness idolatry (Colossians 3:5), and Jesus locates the source of defilement in the heart (Mark 7:20-23). Leader-only forward pointer: the heart that has become a shrine is the heart God will promise to replace in 36:26. That belongs to session 12; tonight you are only deepening the problem the transplant answers.

The righteousness that saves others

There is a deliberate ache in 14:12-20. In their own stories, the righteousness of these men overflowed onto others: Noah's household entered the ark with him (Genesis 7:1), and Job's prayer covered his friends (Job 42:8-10). God says that ceiling has now been reached: even they would deliver only themselves. The Old Testament cannot resolve the ache it creates here; it is left waiting for the one man whose obedience makes the many righteous (Romans 5:19). Let the group feel the ache without rushing to resolve it; the canon will.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Cyprian of Carthage, d. 258

Writing after the Decian persecution, St. Cyprian confronted clergy who rushed lapsed Christians back to communion without repentance. His teaching, in substance: this easy peace was no mercy at all. It soothed the wound at the surface while the infection spread beneath, and it was crueler than the persecution itself, because the persecution attacked bodies while a counterfeit peace destroys souls. A wound must be opened and treated deeply before it can honestly close.

On the Lapsed (*De Lapsis*). Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone who has been handed cheap comfort in the middle of real damage, and for anyone tempted to hand it out.

St. Teresa of Avila, d. 1582

St. Teresa pictures the soul as a castle of many rooms with the King dwelling at the very centre. Her teaching, in substance: many souls never enter their own castle at all. They live in the outer courtyard among the reptiles and vermin that creep in from outside, unaware of the treasure at their own centre, and a soul in serious sin is like that castle plunged into darkness even though the King has not moved. The beginning of prayer is self-knowledge: actually walking inward and seeing what has been living in the rooms.

The Interior Castle, First Mansions. Summary of her teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Prayer as walking inward and finding out who has been given the inner rooms.

St. John of the Cross, d. 1591

St. John teaches, in a famous image, that it makes little difference whether a bird is held by a heavy chain or by a single slender thread: either way it cannot fly until the cord is broken. His teaching, in substance: a small attachment willfully held binds the heart as effectively as a great one, because the question is never the size of the thing we cling to but the fact that the heart is not free. The idol does not need to be impressive; it only needs to be kept.

The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book 1. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For the person whose idol is small enough to seem harmless.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 2113. Idolatry is not limited to pagan statue-worship; it remains a constant temptation to faith, and it consists in divinizing what is not God: power, pleasure, money, ancestry, the state. Man commits idolatry whenever he honours a creature in place of God.

CCC 2114. Human life finds its unity in the adoration of the one God. Idolatry is a perversion of our innate religious sense; the idolater transfers his indestructible notion of God onto something other than God.

CCC 2116. All forms of divination are to be rejected, including horoscopes, omens, and mediums; they contradict the honour and loving trust we owe to God alone. This grounds the treatment of the diviners in 13:17-23.

CCC 2563. The heart is our hidden centre, beyond the grasp of reason and of others; the place of decision, of truth, of encounter, and of covenant. This is exactly the territory Ezekiel 14:3 says the idols have claimed.

CCC 1431. Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of the whole life, a return to God with all one's heart, an end of sin and a turning away from evil. This is what 14:6 is asking for, and what the sacrament of Penance enacts.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

The heart of stone (develop). Planted in session 4 with 11:19. Tonight 14:3 shows why a transplant is the only answer: the heart itself has become the shrine. Draw the line back to 11:19 explicitly when debriefing question 8, but do not resolve; the resolution belongs to session 12.

Follow the glory (develop). The glory does not appear in chapters 12-14, and that absence is the point. The temple still stands in Jerusalem, but we watched the glory leave it in session 4. Notice quietly with the group, if it comes up, that the elders in chapter 14 seek God in Babylon and God answers there, confirming 11:16 without fanfare.

Son of man (develop). God addresses Ezekiel as son of man throughout all three chapters. Keep the tally alive with a light touch; no teaching needed tonight.

The opened mouth (develop). Ezekiel still speaks only what God gives him, in pointed contrast to the prophets of chapter 13 who speak from their own spirit. One sentence of contrast during question 3 keeps this thread warm for its payoff in session 9.

Sealed guess (develop). Tonight quietly feeds the sealed question: God refuses the temple-presumption of Jerusalem yet makes himself available to hearts in Babylon that turn to him. Do not connect these dots aloud; just let the material sit.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Ezekiel 14:9 says that if a prophet is deceived, the LORD has deceived him. Doesn't that make God the author of the lie?

Scripture regularly describes God's judgment in the idiom of God doing what he permits as the ripening consequence of chosen sin; Romans 1:24 uses the same grammar, 'God gave them up.' On that reading, God's judgment is to let a

lie already chosen run its course and carry its penalty. The verse does not say the prophet had already chosen deception, and the Church has not defined the question; offer it as the common Catholic reading rather than as the text's statement. The Church holds firmly that God can neither deceive nor be deceived (CCC 156, quoting the First Vatican Council), so this verse is read as judicial permission, not divine authorship of falsehood. Compare 1 Kings 22:19-23, where the same idiom appears in a vision explicitly framed as God's judgment on a king who has surrounded himself with flatterers.

Chapter 13:17-23 condemns women prophets. Is the Bible targeting women's spiritual leadership?

No. The men are condemned first and at greater length (13:1-16) for the identical crime: speaking from their own spirit in God's name. The women of 13:17-23 are condemned for divination for hire, sewing magic bands and hunting souls for handfuls of barley. The issue is fraudulent claims of divine speech and occult practice, by anyone; the Church's rejection of divination (CCC 2116) applies to every sex and every century, horoscopes included.

Who gets to decide which prophet is false? Ezekiel says 'thus says the LORD' and so did Hananiah. Isn't the whole category unfalsifiable?

Israel was given tests, not vibes: a word that does not come to pass was not from the LORD (Deuteronomy 18:21-22), and a prophet who contradicts what God has already revealed is disqualified regardless of his success rate (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). Within five years of these chapters, everyone in Babylon knew which prophet had spoken truly. For us the discernment is ecclesial: claims of private revelation are weighed by the Church against the deposit of faith, which is exactly the Deuteronomy principle carried forward.

Session Goals

1. Trace the escalation across the three chapters: ignored signs, then sold comfort, then idolatry discovered inside the heart.
2. Lead the group to articulate in their own words why a comfortable religious lie is deadlier than open hostility.
3. Let the group find the Jeremiah parallel and Jesus' whitewashed-tombs saying themselves, and Paul's relocation of idolatry to the heart.
4. Land 14:3 personally but pastorally: honest naming of heart-idols that points toward repentance and confession, never toward shame.
5. Develop the heart of stone thread by connecting 14:3 back to 11:19 without resolving it.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

Win 10 minutes, reading blocks 12 minutes spread through the evening, Build 50 to 55 minutes with the two discoveries and the steelman as the spine, Send and Live It This Week 10 minutes, prayer at both ends. Questions 5, 6, 7, and 8 are the non-negotiable core.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut question 2 (the two proverbs) first, summarizing it in one sentence while introducing chapter 13.

2. Drop both Dig Deeper boxes.
3. Compress question 10: summarize 14:12-20 yourself in two sentences and keep only the hunt for the verb in 14:6.
4. If still pressed, fold question 4 into question 6 by asking about the breach while walking the whitewash parable.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you are not deceived by paint. You see the wall behind the whitewash and the heart behind the words, and still you call us to yourself. Give us tonight what you demanded of Israel: eyes that actually see and ears that actually hear. Where we have grown comfortable with lies because they are religious lies, unsettle us gently. Where something else has taken the inner room, show it to us without crushing us, for you take no pleasure in anyone's death but desire that we turn and live. Speak, Lord; your servants are listening. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. Tell us about a time someone told you a hard truth kindly. How did it land in the moment, and how do you see it now?

W2. What is a comforting phrase people say that you have quietly stopped trusting?

Both questions preview tonight's theme without naming it; do not connect the dots yet, just let the stories breathe.

Read

Read aloud

Three chapters are too long to read whole. Read in four assigned blocks as you reach them: 12:1-16 with two readers (narrator and the voice of the LORD), then 12:21-28, then 13:1-16, then 14:1-11. For question 10, have the group skim 14:12-23 silently for one minute rather than reading it aloud.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The sign and the shrug (Ezekiel 12)

1. In 12:1-7 God has Ezekiel pack refugee baggage, dig through the wall in their sight, and carry the pack out at dusk with his face covered, all in front of the neighbours, before any explanation is given. Why does God keep giving Ezekiel actions instead of speeches? Read 12:2 again: what does it tell us about the audience?

Take it as far as the room wants

Ground. Why dusk? Why the covered face? The prophet performs the humiliation of the king before the king performs it himself.

Depth. Compare Jesus' use of Ezekiel's 'eyes that see not' language when he explains why he teaches in parables (Mark 4:10-12, with Matthew 13:10-15; the same idiom echoes at Mark 8:18 in a different setting). Signs and parables both bypass the filter of the confident.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Verse 2 is the diagnosis: they have eyes to see but see not, ears to hear but hear not, because they are a rebellious house. A rebellious house has learned to filter sermons; it has not yet learned to filter a man hauling exile luggage out of a hole in his own wall. This continues what we saw in session 3: God makes the prophet's body the message so that the message gets past the defenses. And notice whom the sign targets: 'the prince in Jerusalem' (12:10). This is King Zedekiah, and 12:13 makes a strange double claim: he will be brought to Babylon, yet he will not see it. History records the fulfillment with terrible precision: Zedekiah was captured fleeing the city, blinded at Riblah, and taken to Babylon in chains (2 Kings 25:7). He arrived in the land he never saw.

2. In 12:21-28 the people have two proverbs. First: the days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing (12:22). Second, about Ezekiel: he prophesies of times far off (12:27). What is each proverb actually doing for the people who repeat it? Which is more dangerous, and do we have modern versions?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Both proverbs convert delay into denial, but differently. The first is open unbelief: nothing has happened, so nothing will. The second is subtler and more religious: it affirms the word while neutralizing it. Yes, it is from God; no, it does not concern me; someone else, some other generation, will need to repent. That second move is the more dangerous one, because it lets a person feel orthodox while living unchanged. God's answer closes the loophole: none of my words will be delayed any longer (12:28). Modern versions are easy to find: 'God is merciful, it will all work out,' said not as trust but as a reason to change nothing. The tradition calls that presumption.

Whitewash (Ezekiel 13)

3. Read the charge sheet against the prophets in 13:2-7 slowly. What exactly is their crime? Look at where their message comes from and what they claim for it.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The crime is sourcing. They are prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing (13:3), yet they say 'Says the LORD' when the LORD has not sent them (13:6-7). Their sin is not having opinions; it is baptizing their own voice as God's voice. And notice verse 6 suggests they may be partly sincere: they expect God to confirm the word they invented. Self-deception is included in the indictment. The contrast with Ezekiel is total: since chapter 3 his mouth has been under God's control, opened only for God's words. The false prophet's mouth is always open, and only his own spirit comes out.

4. Verse 13:5 uses a strange image: they have not gone up into the breaches or built up a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle in the day of the LORD. What is a breach, and what would going up into one have looked like for a prophet?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A breach is the gap in a city wall where the attack pours through, and the one who stands in it takes the danger personally. Israel's memory had a face for this: Psalm 106:23 says God would have destroyed Israel after the golden calf had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him. Moses stood in the gap by interceding, at his own risk, and by telling the people the truth about their sin. The false prophets did neither. They chose the crowd's

comfort over the crowd's survival, which means that for all their soothing words they never actually loved the crowd.

Dig Deeper

Later in this book God says he looked for a man to stand in the breach and found none (22:30). Sit with where that search finally ends in the New Testament: one who always lives to make intercession (Hebrews 7:25).

Live discovery

Split the room in two. Each group reads its passage aloud among themselves, then reports its findings to the whole room.

Let them find it. Jeremiah 6:13-14; Matthew 23:27-28

5. Two search parties. Group one, find Jeremiah 6:13-14. Group two, find Matthew 23:27-28. Read your passage together, then report back: what did you find, and what does it have to do with Ezekiel 13?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Group one finds Jeremiah, preaching inside Jerusalem in closely related terms, making nearly the same charge: they heal the wound of my people lightly, saying 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. Two true prophets, hundreds of miles apart, one diagnosis. Do not claim they could not have communicated; Jeremiah 29 is a letter from Jerusalem to these very exiles. The convergence is worth noticing on its own terms. Group two finds Jesus reaching for Ezekiel's image six centuries later and sharpening it: not whitewashed walls now but whitewashed tombs, beautiful outside, full of the dead within, and aimed squarely at religious professionals. The whitewash problem did not end with the exile. It is not a Babylonian problem; it is a human one.

6. Walk through the little parable in 13:10-16. Who builds the wall? Who whitewashes it? What does God send against it, and why? Then the real question: what is the wall, and what is the whitewash, in the life of someone in this room?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The people build a flimsy wall: their self-made securities, political alliances, and above all the presumption that God would never let his own temple city fall. The prophets do not build and do not repair; they paint, making the unfinished look finished, which stops anyone from asking the questions that lead to repair. Then God sends the storm, and the storm is not vandalism; it is inspection. He tears the painted wall down before his people are standing behind it in battle, which is a severe mercy. In our lives the wall is whatever we are actually trusting instead of God, and the whitewash is religious language applied over an unrepaired life: 'I'm blessed, it's fine, God has a plan,' painted over an addiction, a dying marriage, a grudge. Like painting over rot on a porch railing: it looks like maintenance, but its real function is to stop the questions.

Dig Deeper

Verses 13:17-23 extend the indictment to diviners who sell magic bands and hunt souls for handfuls of barley. The Church's rejection of all divination, horoscopes included, stands in this exact line: it trades the honour and trust owed to God for a purchasable counterfeit (see CCC 2116).

7. Before we condemn the peace prophets, let's give them the best defence we can. Someone make this case as convincingly as possible, then let's answer it from the text.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. The peace prophets were pastors to a traumatized people. Their hearers were deportees and refugees, families torn between Babylon and Jerusalem, people who had lost everything. Along comes Ezekiel with street theatre about siege and death, and these other men say: God loves this city, God dwells in that temple, this will pass, take heart. Isn't that simply what good pastoral care sounds like? No grief counselor on earth leads with doom. On what grounds is comfort the crime here and relentless bad news the virtue? Surely the real test of a message is whether it helps suffering people cope.

Answering from the text. The test in the text is never tone; it is truth and source. The peace prophets 'have seen nothing': their comfort was fiction, and fiction about a wall you are about to stand behind in battle does not help you cope, it gets you killed. Notice too that Ezekiel is not the anti-hope prophet. He is the one carrying the actual promises, as we found in session 4: God himself a sanctuary to the exiles, a new heart coming. After the city falls, this same Ezekiel will become the great consoler of the book. The difference between him and them is sequence, not temperament: true hope stands on the far side of the truth, while false hope replaces the truth. A doctor who tells you the tumour is benign when it is not has not been kinder than the one who schedules the surgery. And Israel had been given a test that requires no guesswork (Deuteronomy 18:21-22): within five years of these chapters, everyone in Babylon knew which prophet God had sent.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Comfort was not the crime; counterfeit was. The false prophets sold peace they had not been given about a danger they refused to see, and their soothing words functioned as whitewash on a wall about to fall on the people they claimed to love. Ezekiel's hard words were the loving ones, because they were true, and because true hope, which he also carried, only works on the far side of the truth.

Idols move indoors (Ezekiel 14)

8. In 14:1-5 elders of Israel come and sit before Ezekiel to inquire of the LORD. On the surface this is perfectly devout behaviour. What does God say he sees, and why does he refuse to give them a normal prophetic answer? Compare where the idols were in chapter 8 with where they are now.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God sees past the posture: these men have taken their idols into their hearts and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces (14:3). In chapter 8 the idols were in the temple, behind a hole in the wall. In chapter 14 the temple of the idol is the man. This is the book's most important interior move: idolatry has gone indoors, and a person can sit in the prayer meeting with the shrine fully intact inside. God refuses to be consulted like one advisor among the idols, one voice on the committee; instead he says he will answer such a man himself, dealing with the heart directly, because what he wants is not clients but covenant: that they may be my people and I may be their God (14:11). Connect this back to what we found in session 4: God has already promised a heart of flesh for a heart of

stone (11:19). Tonight we see exactly why nothing less than a transplant will do. Where that promise goes, the book will show us; not yet.

Live discovery

Everyone finds both passages; first person to find each reads it aloud.

Let them find it. Colossians 3:5; Mark 7:20-23

9. One more find, and it is short. Find Colossians 3:5, then Mark 7:20-23. What word does Paul attach to greed, and where does Jesus locate the source of what defiles a person?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Paul names covetousness and calls it idolatry, flatly. Jesus says that what defiles comes from within, out of the heart. The apostles read Ezekiel's move as permanent: idolatry did not die when the statues fell out of fashion; it changed address. The Catechism draws the modern map of that same territory: idolatry remains a constant temptation, and we commit it whenever we divinize and serve what is not God, whether power, pleasure, money, or anything else enthroned where only God belongs (CCC 2113). The first commandment is not exhausted by statues; the visible idol is the outward form of a deeper disorder, worship given to a creature in God's place.

10. Skim 14:12-23. God names Noah, Daniel, and Job, three famously righteous men, and says even they would deliver only their own lives. Why these three, and what is the sobering point? Then go back to 14:6 and find the verb God actually wants from Israel.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Each of the three is proverbial for righteousness, and in each of their own stories that righteousness overflowed onto others: Noah's household entered the ark with him, and Job's prayer covered his friends. God's point is that Judah's rot has passed the stage where anyone can shelter under someone else's holiness: not your parents' faith, not your nation's temple, not proximity to holy people. Each heart must do what 14:6 commands: repent, and turn away from your idols. Notice the ache this creates and refuses to resolve: is there anyone, anywhere, whose righteousness could save others? Ezekiel leaves the question open. Hold onto it; the book is not finished, and neither is the Bible.

Dig Deeper

The 'Daniel' of 14:14 may be Ezekiel's celebrated contemporary, or an ancient sage of wider Near Eastern memory whose name is spelled slightly differently in the Hebrew here; scholars genuinely debate it and the Church has not ruled. The verse's point is identical either way, which is a good example of how a text's meaning can be secure while a detail stays honestly open.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. If God named the thing that has been sitting closest to the throne of your heart lately, what do you suspect he would name?

S2. Who in your life needs a true word from you rather than a comfortable one, and what makes that hard to give?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Run a one-question examen each night: 'What did I turn to first today for comfort, escape, or security?' Write one word per night. No self-punishment, just naming; by Friday you will have a map of the inner rooms.
2. Refuse one coat of whitewash. Catch yourself once this week about to smooth something over with a religious phrase, and say something true and present instead: 'I don't know why this is happening, but I'm not going anywhere.'
3. Pray Psalm 139 slowly once this week, and let its last two verses be your own words: ask God to search you, know your heart, and lead you.
4. Ezekiel 14:6 has a concrete address in the Catholic life: the sacrament of Reconciliation. If your nightly one-word list surprises you, take it there. That is what the sacrament is for.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 14:6 (excerpt)

"... Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations."

Ezekiel 14:6 (excerpt)

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord, search us and know our hearts; test us and know our thoughts; see if there is any hurtful way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting. You have shown us tonight that you are not fooled by whitewash and will not share the inner room. So we hand you the paintbrush and the key. Give us the honesty to name what we have enthroned, the courage to turn, and the mercy of a true word spoken kindly, both received and given. You take no pleasure in the death of anyone; you desire that we turn and live. We choose to turn. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 12:1-16** the exile's baggage; the prince who will not see Babylon
- **Ezekiel 12:21-28** the two proverbs of delay
- **Ezekiel 13:1-16** prophets of their own spirit; the whitewashed wall
- **Ezekiel 13:17-23** diviners for hire (Dig Deeper)
- **Ezekiel 14:1-11** idols taken into the heart
- **Ezekiel 14:12-23** Noah, Daniel, Job

Discovery passages

- **Jeremiah 6:13-14** peace, peace, when there is no peace
- **Matthew 23:27-28** whitewashed tombs
- **Colossians 3:5** covetousness, which is idolatry
- **Mark 7:20-23** out of the heart

Supporting passages

- **2 Kings 25:7** Zedekiah blinded; fulfils 12:13
- **Psalms 106:23** Moses stood in the breach
- **Deuteronomy 18:21-22** the test of a prophet
- **Romans 1:24** the idiom of judicial handing over, for 14:9
- **1 Kings 22:19-23** objection bench, the lying spirit
- **Psalms 139:23-24** closing prayer and Live It
- **Romans 5:19** leader only: the righteousness that saves others

Terms

- ***gillulim*** Ezekiel's characteristic contempt-word for idols; many scholars hear a deliberately coarse formation, refusing the idols a neutral noun
- ***shalom*** peace, wholeness; the word the false prophets sold without the substance

Catechism

- **CCC 2113.** idolatry a constant temptation; divinizing power, pleasure, money
- **CCC 2114.** idolatry perverts our innate religious sense
- **CCC 2116.** all divination rejected
- **CCC 2563.** the heart, our hidden centre, place of covenant
- **CCC 1431.** interior repentance, a radical reorientation
- **CCC 156.** God can neither deceive nor be deceived (for 14:9)

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 6. The Foundling Bride

Reading: Ezekiel 16

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that the covenant is a marriage, that sin is adultery against a rescuer, and that the chapter ends not in divorce but in God's own promise, yet I will remember my covenant (16:60).

Catholic Touchstone

The nuptial shape of the covenant: God binds himself to his people as a bridegroom to a bride, which the Church reads as fulfilled in Christ and his Church, sealed in baptism and the everlasting covenant.

Ezekiel 16 is the longest chapter in the book and the most emotionally raw. God tells Jerusalem her own history as a parable: an abandoned newborn rescued, raised, married, and lavished with gifts, who then uses every gift to betray her husband. This session has two jobs. First, let the group feel the shape of the story: everything the bride has is gift, so her sin is not rule-breaking but adultery against a rescuer. Second, walk them honestly through the hard middle of the chapter and land them on the ending, where after fifty-nine verses of failure, God alone speaks and binds himself again. This session builds directly on session 5: the idols of the heart named in chapters 12 to 14 are now shown for what they are, unfaithfulness inside a marriage. Read the pastoral notes below before the session; this chapter needs a careful leader more than most.

What You Need to Know

The parable and its history

The chapter is an allegory of Jerusalem's actual history, told as the biography of one woman. Verse 3 names her mixed pagan origins, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite: Jerusalem was a Canaanite city long before David took it. The exposed infant is Israel's helpless beginnings; the rescue and marriage correspond to the exodus and Sinai; the royal splendor of verses 9 to 14 is the Davidic and Solomonic golden age; the adulteries are idolatry and the foreign alliances with Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon (verses 26 to 29); the stripping and mob violence of verses 35 to 41 are a figurative description of the siege and destruction of 587 BC, which at the moment Ezekiel speaks is still a few years away. Knowing the referents keeps the imagery in its intended register: this is judgment history in figurative dress.

The wedding in verse 8

Verse 8 stacks up the legal language of ancient marriage: spreading the garment over the woman (the same gesture Ruth asks of Boaz in Ruth 3:9), pledging troth, entering covenant, and the formula, and you became mine. Ezekiel is saying plainly what Hosea, Jeremiah, and Isaiah also say: Ezekiel portrays Sinai in nuptial terms, alongside rather than instead of its covenantal and legal form: not only a treaty between a king and vassals but an espousal. The Hebrew word behind God's covenant fidelity is *hesed*,

steadfast covenant love, love that keeps its vows. This is why the prophets call idolatry adultery rather than breach of contract: a contract exchanges goods, a marriage exchanges persons.

The children in verses 20 to 21

The darkest gift-betrayal in the chapter is real history, not rhetoric. Child sacrifice was practiced in Judah at the high place of Topheth in the valley of Hinnom; Scripture itself attests it (Jeremiah 7:31; 2 Kings 23:10, where Josiah defiles the site). Ezekiel's point lands hard: even the children were gifts of the marriage, my children, God says, and she handed them to idols. Do not linger on this in the room, but do not skip it either; it explains the ferocity of God's grief.

Reading the hard imagery in a mixed room

Verses 35 to 43 use graphic, shaming, violent imagery, and someone in your room may be a survivor of sexual or domestic abuse. Prepare for this. Three anchors: first, the woman is a city, and her real-world referent is Jerusalem's ruling establishment, largely powerful men, who were meant to hear this and feel exposed themselves; the text never licenses violence against women, it indicts the hearers. Second, the punishments transparently describe the coming Babylonian siege, exile's despoiling and the invading army, not a pattern for any marriage. Third, the chapter's stated destination is restoration, not disposal: God ends by binding himself to her forever. Say some version of this out loud before reading the middle section, and give explicit permission for anyone to step out or stay silent. The steelman question tonight takes this difficulty head-on rather than pretending it is not there; do not cut that question, cut elsewhere.

The grammar of the ending

Verses 59 to 63 turn entirely on who acts. Her covenant is broken and stays broken (verse 59). What survives is his remembering, and in biblical idiom God remembering is not nostalgia but covenant action, as when God remembered Noah and the waters receded. Verse 59 says plainly that she broke the covenant, and verse 61 says the gift that follows is not on account of that former covenant; the restoration is grace. And verse 63 ends on a paradox worth slowing down for: shame arrives after forgiveness, not before it, the silenced mouth of a person who has been loved past all self-justification. Question 10 works this seam; it is one of the most pastorally fruitful moments in the whole study.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The prophets' shared grammar

Ezekiel did not invent the marriage picture. Hosea lived it, commanded to marry and to keep loving an unfaithful wife, and heard God say, I will betroth you to me for ever (Hosea 2:19). Jeremiah remembers the wilderness years as honeymoon, your love as a bride (Jeremiah 2:2). Isaiah says it flatly: your Maker is your husband (Isaiah 54:5). The group will find these themselves in the discovery moment; your job is to know that Ezekiel 16 is the longest and darkest movement of a song the whole prophetic tradition sings.

Fulfillment in the Bridegroom

The New Testament takes up the picture without apology. Jesus calls himself the bridegroom (Mark 2:19-20), and the Baptist calls himself the bridegroom's friend (John 3:29). Ephesians 5:25-27 reads like a deliberate echo of Ezekiel 16:9-14: Christ loved the Church, gave himself up for her, cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, and presents her in splendor. The washing of the foundling bride is fulfilled in baptism; the everlasting covenant of 16:60 is sealed in the words of institution, the new

covenant in my blood (Luke 22:20). And Revelation 19:7-8 completes the arc: the Lamb's bride is granted her fine linen. The bride's beauty is still, at the end of the Bible, entirely gift.

The stripping reversed

One more thread for you rather than for the handout: in Ezekiel 16 the unfaithful bride is stripped and publicly shamed. In the Gospels the faithful Bridegroom is stripped and publicly shamed in her place. Christians have long read the Passion this way: the punishment the bride earned falls on the Husband. If the hard middle of the chapter has left the room heavy, this is where to point.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Augustine, d. 430

Late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new: late have I loved you.

Confessions X.27.

For the group. Augustine is the foundling grown up: everything was gift, and he spent years spending the gifts on lesser loves before turning to the Giver. Most people in the room have lived some version of verse 15.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, d. 1153

St. Bernard teaches that of all the movements of the soul, love alone allows the creature to answer its Creator in kind: God does not need our fear or our service, but when God loves, he wants nothing other than to be loved in return. The soul that loves God is not merely a servant or a debtor; she is a bride.

Sermons on the Song of Songs (the theme is concentrated in Sermon 83). Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This is why Ezekiel 16 is a marriage and not a contract. God did not rescue the foundling to acquire a servant; he wanted a heart.

St. John Paul II, d. 2005

St. John Paul II teaches that the Old Testament's deepest word for God's mercy, hesed, names a love that stays faithful to the covenant even after the human partner has broken it. When Israel betrays the covenant, God's fidelity does not collapse, because in the end God is being faithful to himself, to his own love and his own promises. Mercy, on this reading, is covenant love that refuses to quit.

Dives in Misericordia, in its treatment of the Old Testament's language for mercy. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This is Ezekiel 16:59-63 in a single word. Her covenant is broken; his *hesed* holds. It is also what every penitent leans on in the confessional.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 219. God's love for Israel is compared to a father's love and is stronger than a mother's; he loves his people more than a bridegroom his beloved, and this love will be victorious over even the worst infidelities. The paragraph's own scriptural anchors include Ezekiel 16.

CCC 1611. The prophets saw God's covenant with Israel in the image of exclusive and faithful married love, and by doing so prepared the People of God to understand the unity and indissolubility of marriage.

CCC 1612. The nuptial covenant between God and Israel prepared the way for the new and everlasting covenant, in which the Son of God unites to himself the Church as his bride.

CCC 796. The unity of Christ and the Church is expressed as bridegroom and bride; Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her to make her his glorious spouse.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

The heart of stone (develop). Chapter 16 shows what the sick heart actually does: verse 30 diagnoses a sick heart, and verses 15 to 34 are the case history of its disordered loves. Name the diagnosis tonight but do not prescribe the cure; the transplant comes in session 12. If someone asks how the bride could ever be different, say that is exactly the right question and the book will answer it.

The everlasting covenant (plant). Plant this tonight from 16:60. The phrase will resurface in chapter 34 and chapter 37, and it is the bridge from this chapter's ending to the Eucharist. Do not connect it forward yet; just make sure the group notices and holds the phrase.

The LORD is there (develop). Lightly. A marriage means dwelling together; a God who re-establishes the marriage forever is a God who intends to live with his bride. One sentence at most, no more, or you will spoil the ending of the book.

Son of man (develop). Verse 2 opens with the familiar address: Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations. The mortal man is again made the mouth of God's grief. Touch it in passing.

Follow the glory (rest). The glory thread rests tonight; chapter 16 has no throne vision. Do not force it. It returns with power later in the study.

Sealed guess (develop). Tonight's ending, an everlasting covenant established by God alone, is quiet evidence for where the book is heading. If someone says their sealed guess just got interesting, smile and move on. Nothing gets opened until session 12.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

If God's covenant love holds no matter what, why does he punish at all? Verses 35 to 43 look like the opposite of unconditional love.

The chapter never presents judgment and love as alternatives. The judgment is the historical fall of Jerusalem. The bride's alliances and idolatries were disastrous in themselves, and Ezekiel says plainly that God judged her through the nations she courted; the text frames even that as belonging to a love story that ends in restoration (16:53-63).

Love that cannot grieve betrayal, and will not let betrayal stand, is not love but indifference. What is unconditional is not the absence of consequences; it is the survival of the covenant on God's side.

Is the chapter saying the people of Jerusalem were literally worse sinners than the people of Sodom?

It is saying something more uncomfortable: judgment is measured against light received. Jerusalem had the covenant, the law, the temple, and the prophets, so her infidelity is graver than the sins of cities that had none of these (16:47-52). Jesus applies the identical logic to towns that saw his miracles and did not repent (Matthew 11:23-24). It is a warning aimed at religious insiders, which means at us.

Session Goals

1. The group lists God's actions in 16:1-14 and concludes for themselves that everything the bride has is gift.
2. The group identifies verse 8 as wedding language and, through the discovery moment, finds that marriage is the prophets' shared picture of the Sinai covenant.
3. The group traces how every instrument of the bride's infidelity in 16:15-34 is a misused gift, and reframes sin as adultery against a rescuer rather than rule-breaking.
4. The group faces the hard imagery of 16:35-43 honestly through the steelman, and can articulate why the chapter is neither abusive propaganda nor safely ignorable.
5. The group lands on 16:59-63 and sees that the ending belongs entirely to God: a broken covenant answered by an everlasting one, and the strange humble shame of the forgiven.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

Roughly: Win 10 minutes, framed reading of the chapter 15 minutes (use the reading plan; do not read all 63 verses straight through), Build 45 to 50 minutes with the steelman given full room, Send, Live It, and closing prayer 10 to 12 minutes. The chapter is emotionally heavy; protect a beat of silence after verse 63 before you start the ending questions.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper boxes first (questions 3 and 7).
2. Then fold question 5 into question 4: ask question 4 and simply mention the strange economics of verses 33 to 34 in your answer summary.
3. Then shorten the second discovery (question 9) to Ephesians 5:25-27 only, dropping the Revelation search.
4. If still pressed, compress question 7 to a single reading of verse 49 with a one-line observation. Never cut the steelman (question 6) or the ending questions (8 and 10).

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you found us when we could not lift our own heads, and everything we have, our life, our breath, our baptism, our place at this table tonight, is your gift. Give us honest hearts as we read a hard and beautiful chapter. Where it exposes us, give us courage; where it wounds, be near; and let us hear underneath every verse the voice of a Love that keeps its vows. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. Tell us about a gift someone gave you that, looking back, you took for granted at the time.

W2. What is the best rescue story you know, from a book, a film, history, or your own life? What makes a rescue story satisfying?

Both questions are seeding tonight's parable; do not explain that. Just let people talk.

Read

Read aloud

Do not read all 63 verses aloud straight through. Before reading anything, tell the room: this chapter uses graphic and painful imagery to describe the fall of a city, and anyone is free to step out or sit quietly at any point. Then read in four framed movements. Reader one: 16:1-14, the rescue and the wedding. Reader two: 16:15-22 and 16:30-34, the betrayal. The leader alone summarizes 16:35-43 in his or her own words, naming it as a figurative description of the coming siege of Jerusalem, and reads only verse 42 aloud. Reader three: 16:44-52, the three sisters. Then the whole group reads 16:59-63 together, slowly. Leave a few seconds of silence before the first Build question.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The rescue: verses 1 to 14

1. Walk back through verses 1 to 14 and list out loud every verb where God is the subject. Then answer this: what does the foundling contribute to her own story?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The list is long: he passed by, said Live to a newborn left to die, made her grow, spread his garment over her, pledged troth, entered covenant, washed her, anointed her, clothed her, shod her, adorned her with jewelry, crowned her, fed her the finest food, and made her a queen whose fame reached the nations. She contributes nothing but her need. Even her famous beauty is not her own: verse 14 says it was perfect through the splendor which I had bestowed upon you. Before there is any law, any obedience, any performance, there is rescue. The covenant begins in sheer

mercy, and everything the bride will later call hers is actually his.

2. Verse 8 is a wedding: the spread garment, the pledge, the covenant, and the formula, and you became mine. God could have pictured Sinai as a treaty between a great king and his subjects, and other parts of the Old Testament do. Why choose marriage? What does marriage say that a contract cannot?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A contract exchanges goods and services; a marriage exchanges persons. Marriage adds everything a treaty lacks: love, exclusivity, intimacy, fidelity, fruitfulness, a shared home. It also raises the stakes of failure. You breach a contract; you betray a spouse. By choosing marriage, God is telling Israel that what he wants from the covenant is not compliance but a heart, and that what idolatry does to him is not administrative but personal. This one verse quietly reframes every commandment in the Bible: the law is not a fee schedule, it is wedding vows.

Live discovery

Split into three pairs or groups. First group, look up Hosea 2:19-20. Second group, Jeremiah 2:2. Third group, Isaiah 54:5. Each group reports back: how does your prophet describe the covenant between God and Israel?

Let them find it. Hosea 2:19-20; Jeremiah 2:2; Isaiah 54:5

3. Is Ezekiel inventing this marriage picture, or did the prophets already talk this way? Let's find out.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

All three speak the same language. Hosea hears God say, I will betroth you to me for ever, with betrothal gifts of righteousness, justice, steadfast love, and mercy. Jeremiah remembers the exodus generation as a honeymoon: the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride. Isaiah says it without any figure at all: your Maker is your husband. Marriage is not Ezekiel's private metaphor; it is the shared grammar of the whole prophetic tradition, and the Church reads it the same way (CCC 1611). Ezekiel 16 is simply the longest and most unflinching telling of the marriage story.

Dig Deeper

The gesture of verse 8, spreading a garment over the woman, appears one other famous place: Ruth 3:9, where Ruth asks Boaz, her kinsman-redeemer, to spread his skirt over her. A redeemer who covers the vulnerable one and marries her: Boaz is a small portrait of what God does in Ezekiel 16, and of what Christ does for the Church.

The betrayal: verses 15 to 34

4. Verse 15 pivots the whole chapter: But you trusted in your beauty. Trace verses 16 to 21. What does the bride do with each gift, and where do the materials for her idolatry come from?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Every single instrument of her infidelity is a gift from her husband. The garments become shrines, the gold and silver jewelry become idols, the fine food becomes offerings set before images, and, most terribly, the children of the

marriage are sacrificed to the idols (verses 20 to 21, and this was literal history in the valley of Hinnom). Sin never creates its own materials; it can only take what God gave and aim it away from him. That is the anatomy of every idolatry, ancient or modern: gift turned against Giver. And the root is named in verse 15: she trusted in her beauty, treating what was bestowed as though it were a possession, forgetting verse 14, where the splendor was his.

5. Verses 33 to 34 say something strange: Jerusalem is unlike any prostitute, because she pays her lovers rather than being paid. What is Ezekiel exposing about how sin actually works?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Sin is not even good business. Historically the verses describe Judah paying tribute to Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, buying protection God had given her freely. But the insight generalizes: the idolater always ends up paying. Sin promises payment and then presents a bill; it costs peace, integrity, relationships, and freedom, and delivers none of what it advertised. Verse 30 diagnoses the engine underneath, a lovesick, wayward heart, a heart whose loves have come loose from their object. The problem of this book is not behavior; it is the heart, and the group has now watched that diagnosis develop for two sessions running.

The hard verses: 35 to 43

6. We summarized rather than read verses 35 to 43, and I want to face honestly why. Here is the strongest form of an objection many serious readers, including Christian scholars, raise against this chapter.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. This chapter takes a female figure and subjects her to degrading, sexually violent imagery: stripping, public exposure, mob violence, all narrated with apparent approval and placed in the mouth of God. Whatever the author intended, a text like this can shape how its readers imagine God, marriage, and women, and it has sometimes been used to excuse real abuse. A number of scholars conclude that it should not be read in worship at all. Isn't the honest response to admit that Ezekiel 16 belongs to its violent age, and is beneath the God whom Jesus revealed?

Answering from the text. Take the objection seriously; it is raised in good faith and the discomfort it names is real. But look at what the text itself is doing. First, the woman is a city, and her real-world referent is Jerusalem's ruling establishment, kings, priests, and elders, mostly powerful men. The original audience was not being handed a weapon against women; they were being told, you are her. The rhetoric is designed to strip the hearers of their self-image, not to strip anyone else. Second, the punishments of verses 35 to 41 are a transparent, figurative description of the siege of 587 BC: the stripping is exile's despoiling, the mob is the Babylonian army, the burned houses are burned houses. This is judgment history in parable form, not a domestic instruction, and no honest reading of the chapter yields permission for any human being to harm another. Third, and decisively, read where the chapter goes: the wronged husband's final word is not disposal but restoration. Verses 60 to 63 bind God to this bride forever. A text written to legitimate abuse does not end with the offended party swearing everlasting covenant faithfulness at his own expense. Having said all that, we should not pretend the imagery becomes comfortable. It stays shocking because Ezekiel chose shock: chapters 12 to 14 showed us a people sedated by comfortable religious lies, and polite rhetoric had already failed. And the canon gives the last word: in the Passion, the Bridegroom himself is the one stripped and publicly shamed, taking the bride's disgrace onto his own body. The chapter is hard. It is not beneath the God of Jesus Christ; read whole, it is on the way to him.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Three anchors for the room. The woman is a city, and her referent is Jerusalem's largely male ruling class, who were meant to feel exposed themselves; the text indicts its hearers rather than licensing anyone's violence. The punishments are the coming siege of 587 BC in figurative dress, not a pattern for human relationships. And the chapter's destination is verses 60 to 63, restoration and everlasting covenant, which no abuse narrative ever reaches. The imagery remains deliberately painful, because polite words had failed; and the gospel completes it, where the faithful Bridegroom is stripped and shamed in the unfaithful bride's place. Honesty requires both halves: we do not sand the chapter down, and we do not read it apart from where it, and the whole Bible, is going.

The three sisters: verses 44 to 58

7. God gives Jerusalem two sisters, Samaria and Sodom, and says she has made them look righteous by comparison. Read verse 49 again carefully. According to God himself, what was the guilt of Sodom? Is it what you expected?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Verse 49 names pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease, and a refusal to aid the poor and needy. Most readers expect the text to lead with the sin of Genesis 19, and verse 50 does gesture at abominations, but God's opening indictment of Sodom is complacent, comfortable prosperity that ignored the poor. That should land on comfortable religious people, which is Ezekiel's aim: Jerusalem had covenant, temple, and prophets, so her infidelity is measured against far greater light. Judgment scales with what you were given. This is session 5's lesson sharpened: the deadliest sins are the respectable ones.

Dig Deeper

Jesus uses exactly this logic in Matthew 11:23-24, telling Capernaum, a town that saw his own miracles, that it will be more tolerable for Sodom on the day of judgment. The measure is light received. Nobody in the Bible hears that warning except religious insiders.

The ending: verses 59 to 63

8. We read verses 59 to 63 together. Read verse 60 once more, slowly. After fifty-nine verses of failure, who does every verb belong to? What, exactly, survives the judgment?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Every verb is God's: yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Verse 59 has just said her covenant is broken and treated as she treated it. So what survives is nothing on her side at all. What survives is his remembering, and when God remembers in Scripture, he acts. Verse 61 makes the grace explicit: the restoration is not on account of her covenant. The marriage survives not because the bride was faithful but because the Husband is; his faithfulness to her is finally his faithfulness to himself and his own love. And notice the upgrade: what was broken was the covenant of her youth; what he will establish is an everlasting covenant. Hold onto that phrase. This book is not done with it.

Live discovery

Split the room in half. First half, look up Ephesians 5:25-27 and answer: what does Christ do for his bride, and in what order? Second half, look up Revelation 19:7-8 and answer: where does the bride's wedding garment come from?

Let them find it. Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7-8

9. A bridegroom who washes his bride, clothes her, and makes her beautiful at his own expense: does the New Testament ever pick this picture up?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Ephesians strongly echoes the same sequence: Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, then cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, then presents her to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle. The washing of the foundling in Ezekiel 16:9 is fulfilled in baptism; the splendor is his gift, just as in verse 14. And in Revelation, the Lamb's bride does not buy or weave her own gown: it was granted her to be clothed in fine linen, and the same verse says what the linen is, the righteous deeds of the saints. Hold both halves: the garment is grace given, and grace really does produce a life. From the first page of this story to the last, the bride's beauty begins as gift. The everlasting covenant promised in 16:60 has a name in the New Testament too: at the Last Supper the Bridegroom calls the cup the new covenant in my blood (Luke 22:20). The marriage is re-established at his expense, and the Church calls that expense the cross.

10. Verse 63 is one of the strangest verses in the Bible: the bride is silenced by shame when, of all moments, she is forgiven. What kind of shame is this? How is it different from the shame that keeps people away from God?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

There are two shames, and they run in opposite directions. The destructive kind says: you are too far gone to come home, so hide. It locks the door from the inside, and it is not from God; the whole chapter refutes it, because the foundling was rescued at her filthiest and re-wed after her worst. The shame of verse 63 arrives after mercy, not instead of it: I forgive you all that you have done, and she has nothing left to say. It is the silence of a person whose self-justifications have been made ridiculous by a love that paid for everything. That shame does not crush the self; it kills the defense attorney inside the self. Anyone who has walked out of a really honest confession knows the feeling: not humiliated, but humbled and quiet and clean. That silence is where next week's chapter will find us.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where in your own life are you most tempted to trust in your beauty, that is, to treat something God gave you as though you had produced it yourself?

S2. What would change in your week if you thought of your faith as a marriage rather than as a set of rules, in how you pray, how you fail, and how you come back?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Each evening this week, before you plan anything or scroll anything, name one good thing from your day out loud and say where it actually came from. One sentence is enough. You are practicing verse 14: the splendor was bestowed.
2. Make a concrete plan, day and time, to get to confession within the next two weeks. Bring Ezekiel 16:63 with you and let the absolution be the moment the verse describes: when I forgive you all that you have done.
3. Once this week, read Ezekiel 16:59-63 slowly, alone, and pray one sentence back to God in your own words. If nothing comes, pray verse 60 back to him as it stands.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 16:60

"yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant."

Ezekiel 16:60

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, faithful Husband of an unfaithful people, you found us, you said Live to us, and you have never once stopped keeping vows we have broken. Where we have trusted in our own beauty, forgive us. Where shame has locked us in, unlock us with your mercy. Remember your covenant with us, and bring us at last to the wedding feast of the Lamb, where the bride wears what she is given. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 16:1-14** the rescue and the wedding
- **Ezekiel 16:15-34** the betrayal; leader summarizes 35-43
- **Ezekiel 16:44-52** the three sisters; verse 49 on Sodom
- **Ezekiel 16:59-63** read together; the everlasting covenant

Discovery passages

- **Hosea 2:19-20** I will betroth you to me for ever
- **Jeremiah 2:2** your love as a bride
- **Isaiah 54:5** your Maker is your husband
- **Ephesians 5:25-27** washed, sanctified, presented in splendor
- **Revelation 19:7-8** the bride's linen is granted her

Supporting texts

- **Ruth 3:9** the spread garment; Dig Deeper
- **Matthew 11:23-24** Capernaum and Sodom; Dig Deeper
- **Luke 22:20** the new covenant in my blood
- **Jeremiah 7:31 and 2 Kings 23:10** leader background: child sacrifice at Topheth

Terms

- ****hesed.**** steadfast covenant love; love that keeps its vows
- ****berith.**** covenant; Ezekiel pictures this covenant with nuptial imagery

Catechism

- **CCC 219.** God loves his people more than a bridegroom his beloved; victorious over infidelity
- **CCC 1611.** the prophets saw the covenant as exclusive, faithful married love
- **CCC 1612.** the nuptial covenant prepared the new and everlasting covenant in Christ
- **CCC 796.** Christ and the Church as bridegroom and bride

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 7. The Soul That Sins

Reading: Ezekiel 18

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that God refuses to let anyone hide behind their parents' guilt or their own past, and that he takes no pleasure in the death of anyone (18:32).

Catholic Touchstone

Personal responsibility and the universal call to conversion: God judges each soul on its own, desires the salvation of every person, and asks for our free yes to the grace he gives.

Tonight the exiles quote a proverb that lets them off the hook: the fathers ate sour grapes, so the children's teeth are set on edge. It sounds like theology; it is actually despair wearing a proverb's clothes. God bans it, claims every soul as his own, and walks through three generations to prove that no one is doomed by their parents and no one is saved by them either. Then he does something the exiles find offensive: he lets the wicked man repent and live, and he lets the righteous man fall. The chapter ends with God practically pleading, turn and live, I take no pleasure in anyone's death. For a room full of young adults carrying family wounds, old sins, and old scorecards, this is one of the most liberating chapters in the Old Testament. Handle it warmly. Some of them have been quoting the sour grapes proverb about themselves for years.

What You Need to Know

The setting: between deportation and destruction

Ezekiel is preaching during the early exile, after the first deportation and before Jerusalem falls; the chapter itself is undated. The exiles in Babylon have settled into a bitter explanation of their situation: we are being punished for what our ancestors did. The proverb in verse 2 was current enough that both Ezekiel and Jeremiah had to answer it; Jeremiah's contemporaries back in Jerusalem were quoting the identical line. It had surface plausibility. The exile genuinely was the harvest of generations of covenant infidelity; 2 Kings 21:10-15 lays the catastrophe explicitly at the feet of Manasseh's generation. The proverb takes that true observation about consequences and twists it into a false claim about guilt: nothing is our fault, and nothing we do can matter.

The shape of the chapter

The argument runs in four movements: the proverb is quoted and banned (verses 1 to 4); a three-generation case study of a righteous man, his violent son, and the son's righteous son (verses 5 to 18); a round of objections and answers, including the accusation that God's way is not just (verses 19 to 29); and a closing appeal that is less a verdict than an invitation (verses 30 to 32).

What *nephesh* means

When verse 4 says the soul that sins shall die, the Hebrew word is *nephesh*, which means the whole living person, not a detachable ghost. The sentence is not a claim about the afterlife mechanics of souls;

it means the person who sins is the one who answers for it. That is why verse 4 opens with God's staggering claim of ownership: all souls are mine. No one relates to God only through their parents. Every person is personally accountable before God and is not judged through a parent's guilt or virtue.

Corporate and personal: Scripture holds both

Ezekiel is not inventing individualism or correcting Moses. Deuteronomy 24:16 already forbade Israel's courts to execute children for their fathers' crimes, and it sits in the same Torah as Exodus 20:5. Scripture has always held two truths together: the consequences of sin ripple through families and generations (the exile itself proves it), but culpability before God is personal. Ezekiel's target is the misuse: a truth about consequences deployed as an excuse and as a license for despair. The steelman chain tonight walks straight into this tension, so read the Objection Bench before the session.

Pastoral note: read the room

This chapter will land hard on two kinds of people. Some carry real family wounds and generational patterns; do not let the discussion sound like God is dismissing what was done to them. Ezekiel does not deny that parents' sins wound children; he denies that those wounds are a verdict. Others carry shame about their own past; verses 21 to 22 are for them, and God's refusal to remember the transgressions of the one who turns should be allowed to breathe. Leave room for silence after question 8. Do not force testimony.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The proverb and the law

The sour grapes proverb collides with two older texts the group will find for themselves tonight: Deuteronomy 24:16, where the Torah itself forbids punishing children for fathers, and Jeremiah 31:29-30, where Ezekiel's contemporary quotes the very same proverb, bans it, and then, in the next breath, announces the new covenant with the law written on hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Two prophets, in two cities, kill the same proverb and follow it with the same medicine: a promise about the heart. This connects directly to the everlasting covenant we found in Ezekiel 16:60.

Exodus held together with Ezekiel

Exodus 20:5 speaks of iniquity visited to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, and the very next verse pours out steadfast love to thousands; Deuteronomy 7:9 makes the asymmetry explicit, covenant love kept to a thousand generations. The generational language describes sin's real communal wake among those who continue their fathers' rebellion, set against a mercy that outruns it beyond all proportion. Ezekiel 18 does not overturn this; it forbids weaponizing it.

Fulfillment in Christ

In John 9:2-3 the disciples ask the sour grapes question about a man born blind, who sinned, this man or his parents, and Jesus refuses the premise. The father in Luke 15:20-24 running to the returned son is Ezekiel 18:21-23 turned into narrative. The laborers hired at the eleventh hour in Matthew 20:1-16 provoke the identical complaint heard in Ezekiel 18:25, that this kind of mercy is not fair. And verse 23 finds its full voice in 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9: God desires all to be saved and is patient, not wishing that any should perish.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, d. 386

Preparing catechumens for baptism, St. Cyril teaches, in substance, that sin is the fruit of free choice, not something fixed in our nature or forced on us from outside; the devil can suggest, he insists, but he cannot compel. And he points to the great penitents of Scripture to prove the other half of the same truth: no one who turns back to God is refused.

Catechetical Lectures, Lecture 2 (On Repentance). Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone in the room quietly thinking, this is just how I am, or, this is just how my family is, Cyril's answer is that no inherited wound, habit or family pattern makes personal sin necessary.

St. Augustine, d. 430

St. Augustine teaches, in substance, that the God who created us without our consent will not justify us without our consent. Creation asked nothing of us; salvation asks for our yes.

Sermon 169. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This is exactly the tension of verse 31 held together: God alone can give the new heart, and we must still turn.

St. Faustina Kowalska, d. 1938

Throughout her Diary, St. Faustina records Jesus insisting that his mercy is greater than any sin and that the greatest sinners have the first claim on it. The often-quoted assurance that he pursues the sinner to the last moment is not pinned to a numbered entry here, so it is left aside.

Diary (Divine Mercy in My Soul). Summary of her teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Ezekiel 18:23 and 18:32 anticipate the theme at the heart of the Divine Mercy devotion: God's settled desire is not anyone's death but everyone's turning.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 1847. Quoting St. Augustine, God created us without us, but he did not will to save us without us; receiving mercy requires admitting our faults and freely responding.

CCC 1037. God predestines no one to hell; that requires a willful turning away from God and persistence in it to the end, and the Church prays that no one be lost.

CCC 1430. Jesus' call to conversion aims first at interior conversion of heart, without which outward works of penance remain sterile.

CCC 1861. Mortal sin results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace; a person in God's friendship really can fall. Ezekiel 18:24 is not a technical description of post-baptismal mortal sin; the Catholic reading applies it by analogy.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

The heart of stone (develop). Verse 31 is the hinge: get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. In 11:19 God promised, I will give them one heart. Tonight he commands what he promised to give. Do not resolve this tension. Name it, let it sit, and tell the group to watch for it. It is the question the back half of the book exists to answer.

The everlasting covenant (develop). The Jeremiah 31 discovery lands the group a few verses away from the new

covenant promise of 31:31-34. Let them notice that both prophets follow the banned proverb with a promise about the heart, and connect it back to yet I will remember my covenant in 16:60. Do not go further than that yet.

Sealed guess (develop). Do not open anything. One light touch near the end if it fits: a God who claims every soul as his own, and pleads with each one to turn and live, is a God who wants to be close. Where does a God like that choose to dwell? Guesses stay sealed until session 12.

Son of man (rest). The address does not appear in chapter 18, so this thread rests tonight. If someone notices its absence, affirm the observation and move on.

Follow the glory (rest). Resting tonight; it returns with force at the book's hinge in session 9.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Ezekiel 18:20 says the son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father. Does that not demolish the doctrine of original sin?

No, because the Church has never taught that we bear personal guilt for Adam's act. CCC 404-405 are precise: original sin is contracted, not committed; a state, not an act. CCC 405 says outright that in Adam's descendants it does not have the character of a personal fault. Ezekiel 18 is about personal culpability, and on that point the Church says exactly what Ezekiel says: no one is personally guilty of anyone else's sin.

Verse 24 says a righteous man can turn away and die in his sin. A Protestant friend committed to eternal security would answer that anyone who falls away like that was never truly righteous, citing 1 John 2:19, they went out from us because they were not of us. Pressed further, they would add two readings that do not depend on that claim at all: that Ezekiel's righteous man is righteous in a covenantal and external sense rather than a regenerate one, and that the death in view through this whole section is the temporal and covenantal death of exile and sword rather than a verdict on his eternal destiny.

Take the objection seriously; 1 John 2:19 is a real text about real counterfeits. But Ezekiel's wording resists the escape: when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness treats the prior righteousness as genuine, not fake. This is why the Church teaches that a person in grace can lose charity through mortal sin (CCC 1861), and why presumption is a sin against hope just as despair is. The chapter refuses both: your past sin is not your destiny, and neither is your past virtue.

The whole chapter sounds like salvation by works: do these things and live.

Read it inside the covenant. The righteous man's deeds in verses 5 to 9 are the shape of fidelity to a God who had already rescued and bound himself to Israel; we saw that rescue in chapter 16. And the chapter's own climax gives the game away: the life God demands requires a new heart and a new spirit (verse 31), which chapter 11 already told us God himself must give. Grace first, response always.

Session Goals

1. The group identifies what the sour grapes proverb claims and why it appealed to the exiles.

2. The group discovers from verses 3 to 20 that God judges each soul on its own, and finds the older witnesses in Deuteronomy 24:16 and Jeremiah 31:29-30 themselves.
3. The group works through the apparent contradiction with Exodus 20:5 and articulates the difference between consequences and culpability.
4. The group discovers from verses 21 to 24 that neither past sin nor past righteousness is destiny.
5. The group hears God's own stated desire in verses 23 and 32 and connects it to his desire for the salvation of all.
6. The group notices the command of verse 31 against the promise of 11:19 and leaves holding that tension deliberately.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

Win 10 minutes, reading 8, Build 45 to 50 with the discovery around minute 30 and the steelman around minute 40, Send and Live It This Week 10, prayers frame the whole. Question 8 deserves unhurried space; budget for silence there.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Fold question 7 into question 6; the unfairness complaint surfaces naturally once the two conversions of verses 21 to 24 are on the table.
2. Drop the Dig Deeper on losing and regaining grace and let the Objection Bench cover it if it comes up.
3. Compress question 3 by assigning one generation of the case study to each third of the room and taking one-line reports.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you know each of us by name. You made every soul in this room and you have never once confused us with our parents, our families, or our own worst chapters. Tonight, give us the honesty to hear your word without excuses and without despair. Where we have been blaming, free us. Where we have been hiding, find us. Open our hearts to the God who says, turn and live. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. What is one trait or habit, funny or otherwise, that you definitely inherited from your family?

W2. When you were a kid, what was something you were convinced was deeply unfair?

Keep both light. The first plants the theme of inheritance and the second plants the theme of fairness; both come back tonight, so do not explain them now.

Read

Read aloud

Read Ezekiel 18 in three voices: reader one takes verses 1 to 13, reader two takes verses 14 to 24, reader three takes verses 25 to 32. Ask the third reader to slow down at verses 30 to 32; the chapter ends in an appeal, not a gavel.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The proverb

1. Look at the proverb in verse 2. What exactly are the exiles saying about themselves and their situation? And what would it feel like, day to day, to actually believe it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The proverb says: our ancestors sinned, and we are the ones suffering for it. On the surface it is a complaint about unfairness, but two darker things hide inside it. First, self-excuse: none of this is our fault. Second, despair: if the verdict was written before we were born, nothing we do can matter. It is a proverb that lets you lie down inside your circumstances. And it had just enough truth in it to be dangerous, because the exile really was the harvest of generations of sin. The exiles took a true observation about consequences and turned it into a false claim about guilt.

2. Read verses 3 and 4 again. God does not merely correct the proverb; he bans it. What is his counter-claim, and why does the phrase all souls are mine matter so much?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Who does God say souls belong to?

Depth. If every soul belongs directly to God, what does that do to the idea of being spiritually doomed, or spiritually safe, because of your family?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God's counter-claim is ownership: behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son. No one relates to God only through their parents. Every person stands in direct, immediate relationship to him, and so every person answers to him directly. The Hebrew word for soul here, *nephesh*, means the whole living person, not a ghost inside you; the soul that sins shall die means the person who sins is the one who answers for it. If God owns every soul individually, then no ancestor's sin can stand between you and him, and no ancestor's virtue can substitute for you either.

Three generations

3. Verses 5 to 18 walk through three generations: a righteous man, his violent son, and that son's righteous son. Trace the chain. What passes down between generations, and what does not?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The pattern is deliberate and shocking for its time: the righteous father's virtue does not save his violent son, and the violent father's guilt does not condemn his righteous grandson. Notice verse 14: the grandson sees all the sins his father has done, and sees, and does not do likewise. Influence is real; the grandson had to look at his father's life and make a decision about it. But inheritance of guilt is not real. Each generation writes its own record before God. The chain of sin can be broken in a single generation by a single person who sees and turns.

Live discovery

Split the room. Half of you find Deuteronomy 24:16 and report what Israel's own law already said. The other half find Jeremiah 31:29-30 and keep reading a few verses past it; Jeremiah was preaching in Jerusalem at the same time Ezekiel was preaching in Babylon. Come back and tell us what you found.

Let them find it. Deuteronomy 24:16; Jeremiah 31:29-34

4. Is Ezekiel inventing something new here, or is he standing on older ground? Let's find out.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Two finds. First, Deuteronomy 24:16: the Torah itself already forbade putting children to death for their fathers' sins; Ezekiel is not correcting Moses, he is enforcing him. Second, and more striking: Jeremiah quotes the identical sour grapes proverb, bans it in almost the same words, and then immediately announces a new covenant, with God's law written not on stone but on hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Two prophets, hundreds of miles apart, kill the same proverb and follow it with the same medicine: a promise about the heart. File that next to the promise we found in chapter 16, yet I will remember my covenant, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant.

But doesn't the Bible say the opposite?

5. Someone in your dorm who has actually read Exodus is going to raise this, so let's raise it first.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. This is not a fringe objection; it comes from the Ten Commandments themselves. Exodus 20:5 says God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation. Ezekiel 18:20 flatly says the son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father. These are not obscure verses in tension; this is the Decalogue against a major prophet. The honest conclusion, a thoughtful skeptic would say, is that either the Bible contradicts itself, or Israel's picture of God evolved and Ezekiel is quietly correcting Moses.

Answering from the text. Three answers, all from the text. First, read all of Exodus 20:5-6: the generational language concerns those who hate me, children who continue their fathers' rebellion, and the very next verse pours out steadfast love to thousands; Deuteronomy 7:9 spells out the asymmetry, covenant love kept to a thousand generations. The mercy is deliberately, absurdly lopsided. Second, Deuteronomy 24:16, which the group just found, sits in the same Torah as Exodus 20:5. Israel always held both truths at once, so this cannot be a later correction of an earlier belief. The two verses answer two different questions: Exodus describes how sin's consequences really do ripple through families and generations, and the exile itself proves that true; Ezekiel addresses personal guilt before God. Third, look at what Ezekiel is actually attacking: not Exodus, but the misuse of Exodus, a true observation about consequences twisted into an excuse and a reason for despair. Consequences are communal. Culpability is personal. Scripture teaches both, and never confuses them.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Exodus 20:5 and Ezekiel 18 answer different questions. Exodus says God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and it says it of those who hate me; read with that qualifier it describes the real communal wake of sin among those who persist in their fathers' rebellion, and it immediately dwarfs that with mercy to thousands of generations (Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 7:9). Ezekiel addresses guilt before God, and on that question the Torah itself already agreed with him (Deuteronomy 24:16). Sin's consequences travel through families; guilt does not. The exiles had collapsed that distinction into fatalism, and God refuses to let the collapse stand.

Two conversions

6. Verses 21 to 24 describe two turns, one in each direction: the wicked man who turns and lives, and the righteous man who turns away and dies. Take them together. What do these two cases do to the power of your past?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They break it, in both directions. The wicked man who turns from his sins will surely live, and verse 22 goes further than anyone expects: none of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him. Not filed away, not held in reserve; not remembered. And the righteous man who turns to sin cannot coast on his old record either; verse 24 treats his former righteousness as real and still says it will not save the person he has chosen to become. Neither your worst chapter nor your best one is destiny. God judges the person you are turning into, not the ledger you are coasting on. The Church holds both edges of this: no sin puts you beyond mercy, and no state of grace makes you unable to fall. That is why presumption and despair are both sins against hope.

Dig Deeper

Verse 24 is one reason the Church teaches that a person in God's friendship really can lose charity through grave sin (CCC 1861), and why the sacrament of penance exists as a real second turning, not a formality. If the group wants the eternal security debate, the Objection Bench has it; do not let it swallow the session.

7. Twice in verses 25 to 29 the people protest: the way of the Lord is not just. Why would this chapter, of all chapters, strike people as unfair? What is it taking away from them?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It takes away both excuses at once. You cannot blame your ancestors anymore, and you cannot bank your past merit anymore. A God who lets a lifelong sinner turn at the end and live offends our sense of scorekeeping just as much as a God who will not let the formerly righteous coast; think of the vineyard workers hired at the eleventh hour and the grumbling that follows (Matthew 20:1-16 echoes this complaint almost exactly). God's reply in verse 29 turns the accusation around: is it not your ways that are not just? The offense is not that God is unfair; it is that his mercy and his seriousness are both bigger than our ledgers.

What God wants

8. Read verse 23 and verse 32 aloud, slowly. In this whole chapter about judgment, what does God explicitly say he does not want? What does he want instead?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Twice, framing the entire chapter, God opens his own heart: have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? And then the last word of the chapter: for I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord GOD; so turn, and live. Judgment in this chapter is real, but it is never what God wants. The chapter does not end with a verdict; it ends with God pleading, why will you die, O house of Israel? The New Testament says it plainly: God desires all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), and is patient, not wishing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). Let this one sit in silence for a moment before moving on. Someone in the room needs verse 32 more than they will say out loud.

The command and the promise

9. Look closely at verse 31: cast away all your transgressions, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Now think back to what we found in chapter 11, where God said, I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh. Who was making the new heart there? Who is commanded to make it here? What do we do with that?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Hold the tension; do not dissolve it. In 11:19 the new heart is a gift only God can give. In 18:31 it is a command we are responsible to obey. Both are fully serious. The command proves that our turning is real and required; God will not treat us as furniture to be rearranged. The promise proves that the turning we owe is beyond our own strength; nobody performs heart surgery on themselves. St. Augustine held the two together in one sentence: the God who created us without us will not justify us without us. Ezekiel has now shown us the command and the promise side by side, and the book has not yet told us how they meet. Watch for it. That question is where this whole story is

going.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where in your life have you been quoting your own version of the sour grapes proverb, a sentence that starts with, I'm like this because?

S2. If God takes no pleasure in anyone's death and is pleading with people to turn and live, who in your life needs you to believe that about them this week?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Write down one blame-script you tell yourself, a sentence that begins, I'm like this because. Then rewrite it as an Ezekiel 18 sentence about who you are choosing to become. Keep both where you will see them.
2. Make a concrete plan for confession this month: pick the parish, the day, and the time, and put it in your phone. If that feels far off, start tonight with a nightly examen that ends with verse 31 said aloud.
3. Pray verse 32 by name each day this week for one person you have quietly written off, including if that person is you.
4. Memorize Ezekiel 18:32 and say it once each morning.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 18:32

"For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord GOD; so turn, and live."

Ezekiel 18:32

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you take no pleasure in the death of anyone. You have banned our excuses and refused our despair in the same breath. Tonight we hand you the proverbs we have hidden behind, the guilt we have carried that was never ours, and the guilt that is ours and needs your mercy. Give us what you command: a new heart and a new spirit. And until you finish that work in us, keep us turning toward you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 18:1-32** read aloud in three parts: 1-13, 14-24, 25-32

Discovery passages

- **Deuteronomy 24:16** half the room
- **Jeremiah 31:29-34** other half; keep reading past verse 30

Steelman and leader background

- **Exodus 20:5-6** the objection text; read verse 6 with verse 5
- **Deuteronomy 7:9** love kept to a thousand generations
- **2 Kings 21:10-15** the exile laid at Manasseh's feet; the proverb's grain of truth
- **Ezekiel 11:19** the promised heart, from session 4
- **Ezekiel 16:60** the everlasting covenant, from session 6
- **John 9:1-3** who sinned, this man or his parents
- **Luke 15:20-24** verses 21 to 23 as narrative
- **Matthew 20:1-16** the unfairness complaint of verse 25
- **1 Timothy 2:4** God desires all to be saved
- **2 Peter 3:9** not wishing that any should perish

Terms

- ****nephesh.**** soul; the whole living person, not a detachable ghost
- ****shub.**** to turn, to return; the Old Testament's word for repentance

Catechism

- **CCC 1847.** God will not save us without us
- **CCC 1037.** God predestines no one to hell
- **CCC 1430.** interior conversion first
- **CCC 1861.** mortal sin and the loss of charity

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 8. For My Name's Sake

Reading: Ezekiel 20:1-44; 21:25-27

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that Israel's whole history is a story of rebellion met by mercy given for God's name's sake, and they meet the mysterious one whose right the crown is (21:27).

Catholic Touchstone

Grace precedes merit: God's saving commitment rests on his own name and covenant fidelity, not on our performance, and his glory and our salvation are wedded, which is why the Our Father begins with the hallowing of his name.

Tonight the elders of the exiles come to Ezekiel wanting an oracle, and God refuses to be consulted like a vending machine. Instead he retells Israel's entire history as a courtroom indictment with one astonishing refrain: at every point where the story should have ended, God says, I acted for the sake of my name. The chapter then swings forward to a second exodus, out of the nations this time, ending on God's holy mountain. Then 21:25-27 removes the crown from the last Davidic king and holds it in trust, until he comes whose right it is. The session's engine is the refrain; its destination is the heir. There is one genuinely hard passage, 20:25-26, and the steelman chain takes it head-on rather than around. Do not skip it; young adults have usually already met it online.

What You Need to Know

The scene: an inquiry refused

It is 591 BC, about a year after the temple vision of chapters 8 to 11. Elders of the exilic community sit before Ezekiel to inquire of the LORD, exactly the posture of chapter 14, where God said he would not be inquired of by men who had taken idols into their hearts. Your group met that scene in session 5; let them notice the rerun themselves. God refuses the consultation and instead files an indictment: let them know the abominations of their fathers. Chapter 20 is Israel's history told by God under oath, and it is far darker than the version Israel told itself.

The refrain that carries the chapter

The history runs in three rounds: Israel in Egypt, the exodus generation in the wilderness, and their children in the wilderness. Each round has the same skeleton: God gives himself and his statutes, Israel rebels, wrath is deserved and even resolved upon, and then the hinge: but I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations (20:9, 14, 22). Two surprises hide in round one. First, Israel was already idolatrous in Egypt, before the exodus, and refused God's command to cast the idols away. Second, God considered pouring out his wrath in Egypt itself. The exodus was therefore never a reward for fidelity. It was mercy given for the sake of God's name, from the very first page.

What acting for his name's sake means

God's name in Scripture is not a label; it is his revealed character and his public reputation among the nations, bound by covenant oath to this particular people. If Israel is destroyed for her sins, the nations will conclude either that the LORD is weak or that he is faithless. God has, so to speak, staked his reputation on Israel the way a bridegroom stakes his name on his bride (your group built the marriage frame in session 6). So his fidelity to Israel is fidelity to himself, and that is precisely why it cannot be exhausted by Israel's failure. Verse 44 lands the point: I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways. This is the Old Testament's deepest anticipation of what the Church calls grace.

The hard verse: statutes that were not good (20:25-26)

After the third rebellion God says he gave them statutes that were not good and defiled them through their gifts in making them offer their first-born. Read cold, this sounds as if God commanded child sacrifice. Be ready. Three anchors: first, Ezekiel himself condemns child sacrifice as a defiling abomination (16:20-21; 20:31), and Jeremiah says God did not command it, nor did it come into his mind (Jeremiah 7:31). Second, the Torah's actual firstborn law commands redemption, not sacrifice (Exodus 13:13; 34:20). Third, Scripture has a grammar of judicial handing over: God gave them over to what they insisted on choosing (Psalm 81:12; Romans 1:24-26). The Church has not defined a single reading of these verses; interpreters ancient and modern propose judicial abandonment to deadly customs, or the pagan statutes Israel adopted, or the law in its condemning function. What is fixed doctrinally is that God is in no way the cause of moral evil (CCC 311) and never commands intrinsic evil. Present the range honestly; do not flatten it.

The second exodus and the holy mountain (20:32-44)

The exiles' secret plan surfaces in verse 32: let us be like the nations, and worship wood and stone. Assimilation, disappearance. God's answer is a sworn oath: with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, I will be king over you. That arm language is lifted straight from the exodus tradition; your group will find its source themselves in the discovery moment. The new exodus has a new wilderness, the wilderness of the peoples, a face-to-face judgment, a purge of rebels, and a destination: accepted worship on my holy mountain. Note verse 43: the restored people remember and loathe their ways. That is contrition inside mercy, after restoration, not a condition for it. Handle it pastorally; more below in the objection bench.

The crown in trust (21:25-27)

Chapter 21 is the song of the drawn sword against Jerusalem. Verses 25 to 27 address the unhallowed wicked prince of Israel, which is Zedekiah, the last Davidic king to sit in Jerusalem. The turban and crown come off; everything is overturned; a ruin, a ruin, a ruin. After roughly four centuries the throne of David goes empty. But the sentence does not end with ruin. It ends: until he comes whose right it is, and to him I will give it. The line deliberately picks up Jacob's deathbed blessing over Judah in Genesis 49:10, where the scepter stays with Judah until he comes to whom it belongs. Ezekiel is not destroying the crown; he is placing it in trust for the rightful heir. Your group finds the Genesis text themselves. Do not name the fulfillment for them; the room will get there, and Luke 1:32-33 is in your answer box when they do.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The exodus retold, and an exodus promised

Ezekiel 20 reads Israel's founding story against the grain of national pride and finds grace at the bottom of it, then promises a second exodus in the same vocabulary. The mighty hand and outstretched arm of Exodus 6:6 and Deuteronomy 4:34 becomes the arm that gathers exiles from the nations. The New Testament inherits exactly this pattern: the prophets teach Israel, and then the Church, to read salvation as a new and greater exodus, which the Gospels present as accomplished in Christ's death and resurrection, the passover of the Lord.

Judah's scepter and the empty throne

Genesis 49:10 promised that the scepter would not depart from Judah until he comes to whom it belongs. Ezekiel 21:27 speaks at the precise moment that promise looks dead, and is commonly read as an allusion to it: until he comes whose right it is. Genesis 49:10 is textually difficult, so hold the link as a traditional reading rather than a quotation. The exile does not cancel the Davidic promise; it clears the stage for the heir. Gabriel's words to Mary, that God will give to Jesus the throne of his father David and his kingdom will have no end (Luke 1:32-33), are the New Testament claiming that the trust has been executed and the crown handed over.

The name hallowed

The logic of chapter 20, that God saves for the sake of his own name, flows directly into the first petition of the Lord's Prayer. Israel profaned the name among the nations; the just of the old covenant learned to hope that God himself would hallow his own name by saving his people (CCC 2811). When Jesus teaches us to pray hallowed be thy name before we ask for anything else, he is teaching us to pray Ezekiel 20 back to God.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Augustine, d. 430

When God crowns our merits, he crowns nothing other than his own gifts.

Letter 194 (to Sixtus), 5.19.

For the group. This is verse 44 in one sentence: God deals with us for his name's sake, not according to our ways, and even the good we manage to do began as his gift.

St. Justin Martyr, d. c. 165

Justin argues, in substance, that Jacob's blessing over Judah, that the scepter would not depart until he comes to whom it belongs, is fulfilled in Christ: the visible kingship of Judah could lapse only because the one for whom it was held in trust had come, and the obedience of the peoples now gathers to him.

First Apology 32. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. When the group finds Genesis 49:10 tonight, they are standing in a reading of the text that Christians have made since the second century; this is not a modern connect-the-dots.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, d. 1897

St. Thérèse resolved, in substance, that in the evening of this life she would appear before God with empty hands, not asking him to count her works, since all our justice has stains in his sight, but asking instead to be clothed with God's own justice and to receive from his love the eternal possession of himself.

Act of Oblation to Merciful Love (1895). Summary of her teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This is what it looks like when a soul actually believes Ezekiel 20:44: not laxity, but a total confidence that rests on God's character rather than her own record.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 2811. Despite the holy Law given again and again, the people profaned God's name among the nations, and so the just of the old covenant came to hope that God himself would act to hallow his own name by saving his people. This is the Catechism reading exactly the situation of Ezekiel 20.

CCC 122. The Old Testament, even with things imperfect and provisional in it, shows us the true pedagogy of God: he teaches his people the way a patient father teaches, over centuries. Chapter 20's three rounds of rebellion and mercy are that pedagogy in story form.

CCC 210-211. After the golden calf, God reveals the meaning of his own name by proclaiming himself merciful and gracious, keeping steadfast love even for a sinful people. God's name and God's mercy are disclosed together.

CCC 2008. Merit in the Christian life exists only because God freely chose to associate us with the work of his grace; his fatherly action comes first, our free collaboration second. Grace precedes everything we could ever put on the scale.

CCC 2011. The charity of Christ is the source in us of all our merits before God; the Catechism illustrates this with St. Thérèse's offering of herself with empty hands to merciful Love.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Whose right it is (plant). New thread planted tonight at 21:27. The crown comes off the last Davidic king and is held in trust for a rightful heir. Let the group feel the ache of the empty throne; do not resolve it fully. It develops in session 11 with my servant David and pays off across sessions 13 to 16.

The everlasting covenant (develop). Chapter 20 shows the covenant surviving on God's side alone: he swears by himself and speaks of bringing the purged people back under his rod and into covenant again (20:37). Connect quietly to 16:60 from session 6, yet I will remember my covenant. Do not hang the point on the exact wording of 20:37; see the uncertainties list, the translations diverge there.

The heart of stone (develop). Verse 43, they shall remember and loathe their evil ways, shows hearts beginning to feel again, but only after restoration. The transplant itself is still four sessions away. If someone asks how people this stubborn could ever change, smile and say hold that question; it is the best question in the book.

Son of man (develop). God again addresses Ezekiel as son of man (20:3-4, 27). One mortal man is made to carry God's word to the whole house of Israel; keep the title warm without unpacking it.

Follow the glory (rest). No glory movement tonight. The glory left in chapters 10 and 11 and has not moved since. Let the absence sit; it makes chapter 43 land harder.

The opened mouth (rest). Nothing tonight; the mouth thread resolves at the hinge next session. Do not preview it.

Sealed guess (develop). Leader only: verse 40, all Israel serving God on my holy mountain, is a live clue for the sealed guesses written in session 1. You may say, without explaining, hold verse 40 somewhere safe in your mind. Do

not connect it aloud to the guesses; they open at session 12.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

A God who saves people to protect his own reputation is an egotist. Real love acts for the beloved, not for the lover's brand.

For a creature, self-promotion is theft, because the glory belongs elsewhere. God is not one being among others competing for credit; he is the source of all good, so drawing us to himself and giving us our deepest good are the same act. If God acted for anything less than himself, he would be pointing us at something less than the best. And notice what acting for his name's sake concretely produced in chapter 20: not abandonment but rescue, three times over, for people who had earned none of it. His glory and our salvation are not rivals; in the covenant he has wedded them.

Verse 43 says the restored people will loathe themselves. Isn't that exactly the toxic religious shame we should be helping young adults escape?

Watch the order of events. They are restored first, accepted first, brought home first, and then, safe inside mercy, they remember and grieve what they were. That is contrition, and it heals; shame that comes before mercy, or instead of it, crushes. Session 7 already established that God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone (18:32). If someone in the room carries real self-hatred, name the difference gently: godly sorrow looks at the wound in the light of the Physician; shame looks at the wound in the dark. The confessional exists precisely to keep sorrow in the light.

Session Goals

1. Trace the three-round cycle of rebellion and mercy in Ezekiel 20 and name its engine: God acting for the sake of his own name.
2. Face 20:25-26 honestly, presenting the strongest form of the objection and the range of faithful readings without flattening the difficulty.
3. Discover the second-exodus promise by tracing the mighty hand and outstretched arm back to its source.
4. Meet the one whose right it is in 21:27 and connect the crown held in trust to Jacob's blessing over Judah.
5. Land the pastoral point: God's covenant fidelity rests on his name and character, not our performance, and it does not fail; that is not the same as final salvation without repentance and perseverance, and the chapter's judgment on rebels is part of the same oracle.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

Roughly: prayer and Win questions 12 minutes; the chapter 20 reading in three blocks 12 minutes; questions 1 to 5 about 30 minutes, of which the steelman on 20:25-26 deserves a full 10; the discovery and questions 6 to 7 about 15

minutes; the 21:25-27 reading and questions 8 to 10 about 15 minutes; Send, Live It, and closing 10 minutes. Those blocks total 94 minutes, which is over the ceiling: plan to take the first cut below before you start, not during.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. First cut: the Dig Deeper boxes on questions 4 and 9. Point to them on the Take-Home instead.
2. Second cut: compress question 7 by folding its content into your shared answer after question 6, keeping only the pastoral note on verse 43.
3. Third cut: compress question 2 by summarizing the Egypt scene yourself in two sentences after the reading, and move straight to the pattern in question 3.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you swore by your own name to a people who kept breaking their word, and you kept yours. You acted for the sake of your name in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in Babylon, and you have acted for the sake of your name in every one of our lives. Retell our history tonight in the light of your mercy. Open the Scriptures to us, and open us to the Scriptures, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. Think of a story your family retells every time you gather. Why that story? What does the retelling actually do to the people in the room?

W2. Has your name, or your family's name, ever made you do the right thing when you did not feel like it? What is it about a name?

Both questions are loading tonight's two big ideas, retold history and the weight of a name. Do not explain that; just enjoy the answers.

Read

Read aloud

Ezekiel 20 is long and it builds by repetition, so let it be heard as repetition. Three readers: 20:1-17, 20:18-32, 20:33-44. Before you start, ask everyone to raise a finger silently each time they hear God act or refrain for the sake of my name. Hold 21:25-27 back; it gets its own dramatic reading at question 8.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The refused inquiry

1. Look at 20:1-4. What do the elders come for, what does God refuse, and what does he give them instead?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They come to inquire of the LORD, wanting an oracle, probably reassurance. God flatly refuses: as I live, I will not be inquired of by you. We have seen this exact scene before: in chapter 14 God refused the elders because they had taken idols into their hearts. Instead of a consultation he opens a trial: let them know the abominations of their fathers. God will not be treated as a service you consult while your heart belongs elsewhere. What he gives instead of the answer they wanted is the history they needed.

Egypt, before the exodus

2. Read 20:5-9 again slowly. What does this passage tell us about Israel in Egypt that the version of the story we usually tell leaves out? And what stopped the story from ending right there?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Two shocks. First, Israel was already worshipping idols in Egypt, and when God commanded them to cast the idols away, they refused. Second, God says he considered pouring out his wrath on them in Egypt itself, before any exodus. What stopped him: but I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations. So the exodus was never a reward for faithfulness. From the very first page, rescue was mercy given for the sake of God's own name.

The pattern

3. Now trace 20:10-26 as a group. How many rounds of the cycle do you count, and what are the fixed elements that repeat every time?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. If the room is quiet, just ask: who keeps this story going, Israel or God? How do you know?

Ground. Ask what a name means in Scripture: not a label but God's revealed character and his public reputation among the nations, bound to this people by oath. If Israel is destroyed, the nations conclude the LORD is weak or faithless.

Depth. Ask why mercy anchored in God's name is more secure than mercy anchored in our repentance. If the cycle proves anything, it is that mercy resting on performance would have ended in Egypt, in round one.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Three rounds: Israel in Egypt, the exodus generation in the wilderness, and their children in the wilderness. The fixed elements: God gives himself and his statutes, the ones by whose observance man shall live; he gives the sabbaths as a sign; Israel rebels; wrath is deserved and even resolved upon; and then the hinge, but I acted for the sake of my name, or I withheld my hand for the sake of my name (verses 9, 14, 22). The engine of Israel's history is not Israel's fidelity. It is God's fidelity to his own name.

4. Of all the commandments, the sabbaths get singled out twice as a sign (20:12, 20). Why the sabbath? And why might that matter enormously to people sitting in Babylon?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The sabbath is the covenant made visible in time: a weekly badge that says these people belong to the LORD, given, verse 12 says, that they might know that I the LORD sanctify them. And notice what a sign in time means for exiles: you cannot take the temple to Babylon, but you can keep the sabbath anywhere. It is a portable sign of belonging. That fits what we discovered in session 1: God is not confined to his temple, and neither is membership in his people.

Dig Deeper

The Church receives this instinct in the Lord's Day. Sunday is not simply the sabbath moved a day; the Catechism

explains that Sunday fulfills the sabbath in Christ's resurrection (CCC 2175). Ask: what does our keeping of Sunday actually signal to the people who watch our lives?

The hard verse

5. Verses 25-26 are among the hardest in the book: I gave them statutes that were not good. Before we answer anything, let's state the objection as strongly as we can.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Here is how a serious skeptic reads this passage, and it deserves a serious hearing. In God's own voice, the Bible admits that God gave Israel laws that were not good, and defiled them through the sacrifice of their first-born. This is not an enemy's slander; it is Ezekiel reporting the LORD's own words. And Exodus 22:29 looks like exactly such a law: the first-born of your sons you shall give to me. So the critic concludes: either the God of the Old Testament really did command child sacrifice at some stage, or the Bible contradicts itself about what God commanded. Either way, the claim that God's law is always good collapses from inside the text.

Answering from the text. Take the objection seriously and answer from the text. First, Ezekiel himself, in this very book, condemns child sacrifice as a defiling abomination that God punishes (16:20-21, and verse 31 of this chapter), and Jeremiah says of it, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind (Jeremiah 7:31). Second, the Torah's actual firstborn law commands redemption, not sacrifice: every first-born son is bought back (Exodus 13:13; 34:20). Third, Scripture has a grammar for what verses 25-26 are doing, the grammar of judicial handing over: God gave them over to their stubborn hearts (Psalm 81:12), and St. Paul uses the same verb three times in Romans 1, at verses 24, 26 and 28: God gave them up to what they chose. Notice where verses 25-26 sit: immediately after the third rebellion, as sentence, not as origin. God let a people determined to have pagan customs go to those customs, so that the horror itself would teach them what they had chosen. The Church has not defined one single reading of these verses, and faithful interpreters differ: some read judicial abandonment, some read the not-good statutes as the pagan laws Israel adopted, some read the law in its condemning function. What is fixed is this: God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil (CCC 311), and he never commanded the abomination he everywhere condemns.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The principal Catholic reading is that the statutes that were not good are not God authoring evil, but God, after three rounds of rebellion, letting a determined people go to the deadly customs they insisted on, as judgment, the same handing over Psalm 81 and Romans 1 describe. Ezekiel and Jeremiah both explicitly deny that God commanded child sacrifice, and the Torah's firstborn law commands redemption, not death. Catholics are free to weigh several readings of the verse's exact mechanics, because the Church has not defined one; what no reading may say is that God commands evil. It is honest to add: this verse stays hard. Scripture does not owe us comfort on every line, and a faith that can sit inside a hard text without panicking is stronger, not weaker.

The second exodus

Live discovery

Split into pairs. Hunt down where the phrase about God's mighty hand and outstretched arm comes from. Two pairs take the first passage, two take the second, one takes the third. Report back: who first acted with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and to do what?

Let them find it. Exodus 6:6; Deuteronomy 4:34; Deuteronomy 5:15

6. In 20:32 the exiles' secret plan finally surfaces: let us be like the nations, and worship wood and stone. Just disappear into Babylon. Now read God's answer in 20:33-38. There is a borrowed phrase in verses 33 and 34, and it comes from somewhere specific.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It is exodus language, word for word: the arm that broke Egypt and pulled Israel out. God is announcing a second exodus, out of the nations this time. The exiles' plan is assimilation; God's answer is, you will not disappear, because with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm I will be king over you. And like the first exodus, this one runs through a wilderness, the wilderness of the peoples, with a face-to-face judgment and a purging of rebels, before it comes home. Homecoming and judgment are not alternatives in this book; the road home runs through the refining.

7. Follow the new exodus to its destination in 20:39-44. Where does it end, what do the restored people feel, and what do they finally know?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It ends in accepted worship: on my holy mountain, all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me, and God says there I will accept them (verse 40). What they feel, verse 43, is remembrance and grief: they remember their ways and loathe what they did. Notice the order carefully: they are restored first, accepted first, and then, safe inside mercy, they grieve what they were. That is contrition, not shame; shame crushes because it comes before mercy or instead of it. And what they know, verse 44, is the whole session in one verse: you shall know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways. Session 7 told us God takes no pleasure in anyone's death; tonight tells us why his mercy holds: it is anchored in him, not in us.

The crown comes off

8. Now turn to 21:25-27 and have one strong reader read it aloud, slowly. Who is this unhallowed wicked prince, and what exactly happens to the crown?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The prince is Zedekiah, the last Davidic king to reign in Jerusalem, the one who will see the city fall. The turban and the crown are removed; things shall not remain as they are; the low is exalted and the high abased; a ruin, a ruin, a ruin. After roughly four centuries, the throne of David goes empty. But listen to the last clause: there is an until. The crown is not melted down. Until he comes whose right it is; and to him I will give it. The crown is taken off and held in trust, like an inheritance in escrow, waiting for a rightful heir.

Live discovery

Everyone find Genesis 49:8-10, Jacob's deathbed blessing over Judah, the tribe of the kings. Read it in pairs and answer two things: what did Jacob promise about the scepter, and what is Ezekiel doing with that promise at the exact moment the throne falls?

Let them find it. Genesis 49:8-10

9. That last line, until he comes whose right it is, is quoting something. It reaches back to a blessing spoken over one of Jacob's sons at the very beginning of the Bible.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Jacob promised that the scepter would not depart from Judah until he comes to whom it belongs, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Ezekiel quotes that promise at the precise moment it looks dead. That is the point: exile does not cancel the promise, it clears the stage. The crown is off every unworthy head and reserved for the one it was always for. Christians have read it this way since the second century, and the New Testament claims the trust was executed: the angel tells Mary that God will give to Jesus the throne of his father David, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:32-33). Let the group make that last connection themselves; someone will.

Dig Deeper

The Hebrew of Genesis 49:10 is famously difficult; the traditional reading is until Shiloh comes, and translations differ. What has been steady across ancient Jewish and Christian readers alike is the messianic direction of the verse: the scepter waits for someone. The wording is a crux; the hope is not.

Why this is good news

10. Last one. Some people hear for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways and feel almost insulted: so he doesn't do it for us? Why is this actually the safest ground in the world to stand on?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Run the alternative. If God's commitment rested on Israel's performance, chapter 20 shows exactly where the story ends: in Egypt, round one, before there was ever an exodus. Because it rests on his own name, his character and his sworn covenant, it cannot be exhausted by our failure. And this is not God loving his brand instead of us: in the covenant he has tied his name to his people the way a spouse ties a name to a ring, so that his glory and our salvation are wedded and cannot be separated. That is why the first thing Jesus teaches us to ask for is hallowed be thy name: we are asking God to do again what he did in Ezekiel 20, to glorify his name by saving his people. It is the prayer of people who know their history and trust his character more than their own.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Tonight God retold Israel's whole history with the refrain, but I acted for the sake of my name. If God retold your history, where would that refrain fall?

S2. Where in your life this week are you still trying to earn something God wants to give for his name's sake?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Write your own Ezekiel 20. One page, private, no one sees it: a timeline of your history with God, marking the

rebellions honestly and the mercies honestly. Over each mercy you did not earn, write for his name's sake. Bring what the exercise taught you, not the paper.

2. Wear the sign in time. The sabbath was the covenant badge Israel could keep even in Babylon. This Sunday, keep the Lord's Day deliberately: Mass, plus one honest hour of rest with no screen, chosen in advance and kept like an appointment.

3. Pray the Our Father slowly once a day this week, and stop for ten full seconds after hallowed be thy name. In the silence, ask God to hallow his name in you, the way he hallowed it in Israel: by mercy.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 20:44

"And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel, says the Lord GOD."

Ezekiel 20:44

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you dealt with your people for your name's sake, not according to their evil ways, and you have dealt so with us. You took the crown from every unworthy head and kept it for the one whose right it is, and you gave it to your Son. Hallowed be your name: in your Church, in this room, in each of our histories. Give us this week the honesty to remember, the sorrow that heals, and the confidence of children who stand on your character and not on our own. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 20:1-44** read in three blocks: 1-17, 18-32, 33-44
- **Ezekiel 21:25-27** held back; read aloud at question 8

Discovery sources

- **Exodus 6:6** mighty hand, outstretched arm
- **Deuteronomy 4:34** exodus formula
- **Deuteronomy 5:15** exodus formula, sabbath grounds
- **Genesis 49:8-10** Judah's scepter, until he comes

Bench for the hard verse (20:25-26)

- **Ezekiel 16:20-21** child sacrifice condemned
- **Ezekiel 20:31** condemned within this chapter
- **Jeremiah 7:31** nor did it come into my mind
- **Exodus 13:13** first-born redeemed, not sacrificed
- **Exodus 34:20** redemption law repeated
- **Psalms 81:12** gave them over to stubborn hearts
- **Romans 1:24-26** God gave them up, judicial handing over

Fulfillment and continuity

- **Luke 1:32-33** the throne of his father David
- **Ezekiel 14:1-3** the earlier refused inquiry, session 5
- **Ezekiel 18:32** no pleasure in death, session 7
- **Ezekiel 16:60** yet I will remember my covenant, session 6

Terms

- *****lema'an shemi***** for the sake of my name, the refrain of chapter 20
- *****shabbat***** the sabbath, given as the portable sign of the covenant in time
- *****Shiloh***** traditional rendering of the crux in Genesis 49:10, until Shiloh comes, read messianically by ancient Jewish and Christian interpreters

Catechism

- **CCC 2811.** the name profaned, and the hope that God will hallow it himself
- **CCC 122.** the Old Testament as true divine pedagogy
- **CCC 210-211.** God's name revealed as mercy after the golden calf
- **CCC 2008.** merit exists because grace comes first
- **CCC 2011.** Christ's charity the source of all merit; Thérèse's empty hands
- **CCC 311.** God in no way the cause of moral evil

- **CCC 2175.** Sunday fulfills the sabbath in Christ

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 9. The Delight of Your Eyes

Reading: Ezekiel 24; 33:1-33

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers the book's hinge: the dated word marks the day the siege began and is vindicated when Jerusalem falls, Ezekiel loses his wife as a living sign of the loss, the watchman charge is renewed, and the prophet's mouth is opened for a new kind of message.

Catholic Touchstone

God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone and swears it by his own life; and hearing the word of God is not the same as doing it, which is why the Church insists that faith must become obedience and love.

Tonight is the pivot of the entire study. Everything from session 1 to session 9 has been warning; everything from session 10 onward is judgment on the nations and then, from session 12, a rising tide of hope. The pivot itself has two panels. In chapter 24 God dates the day the siege of Jerusalem begins, tells the parable of the corroded pot, and then asks the costliest sign of the whole book: Ezekiel's wife dies, and his strange restrained grief becomes a picture of what is about to happen to the exiles. In chapter 33 the watchman charge from session 3 is renewed, God swears an oath of mercy, the fugitive arrives with the words the whole book has been building toward, the city has fallen, and Ezekiel's long muteness ends. Be gentle tonight. Chapter 24 touches bereavement directly, and someone in your room is almost certainly carrying a loss. Slow down, allow silence, and do not rush past the grief to get to the theology.

What You Need to Know

The hinge of the book

Ezekiel has a deliberate architecture. Chapters 1 to 24 are warning delivered before the fall of Jerusalem. Chapters 25 to 32 are oracles against the nations. Chapter 33 is the hinge, and chapters 34 to 48 are almost entirely hope: the shepherd, the new heart, the dry bones, the returning glory, the river. We are pairing chapter 24 with chapter 33 tonight so the group experiences the hinge as a single dramatic movement: the last warning, the loss, and the turn.

The dates matter

In 24:1-2 God tells Ezekiel, sitting in Babylon, the exact day the siege of Jerusalem begins, roughly seven hundred miles away, and commands him to write it down. On the usual reckoning the siege began in the winter of 588 BC and the city fell in the summer of 587 or 586 BC; scholars debate the precise year, so hedge if asked. In 33:21 a fugitive finally reaches the exiles with the news, months after the event, because news traveled at walking pace. The written date functions as verification: when the survivor's account is compared with the dated prophecy, the exiles can check that God spoke before the event, not after it.

The costliest sign-act

In session 3 the group discovered that God makes the prophet's body the sermon. Tonight that principle reaches its most painful point. God tells Ezekiel that the delight of his eyes will be taken at a stroke, and his wife dies that evening. He is commanded not to perform the public rituals of mourning: no covering the lips, no mourners' bread, no bare feet or uncovered head. He may groan, but quietly. When the people ask what this means, the answer lands like a hammer: they are about to lose the delight of their eyes, the sanctuary itself, along with sons and daughters left behind in Jerusalem, and the catastrophe will be so total they will be too stunned to mourn. Ezekiel's silent grief is a preview of their numbness.

The muteness ends

Back in 3:26-27 God bound Ezekiel's tongue: he could speak only when God opened his mouth, and only what God gave him to say. In 24:25-27 God promises that when the fugitive arrives, Ezekiel's mouth will be opened fully. In 33:21-22 it happens: the hand of the LORD is on him the evening before the fugitive comes, and when the news arrives he is no longer mute. This resolves the thread we planted in session 3. From this night on, the watchman who could only sound alarms becomes the herald of the shepherd, the new heart, the rising bones, and the returning glory.

Hearers who do not do

Chapter 33 ends with one of the most uncomfortable passages in the book for a Bible study group to read, which is exactly why you must not cut it. Now that Ezekiel has been vindicated, he is popular. People invite each other to come hear the word of the LORD. They sit in front of him, they are moved, and they do nothing. Their hearts are set on their own gain. To them he is like someone who sings love songs beautifully. Let the group feel the edge of this: it is possible to treat the word of God, and even this study, as a lovely playlist. That image of the playlist is ours, not the text's, but the diagnosis is straight from verse 32.

Pastoral note

Do not treat 24:15-18 as a puzzle to be solved briskly. If someone in the room has lost a spouse, a parent, or a child, this chapter will not be abstract for them. Name the difficulty out loud, allow silence, and let the steelman question do its work honestly rather than tidily. The Church does not have a formula that makes the timing of any particular death painless, and pretending otherwise will cost you the room's trust.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The watchman and the Watchman

The watchman charge renewed in 33:1-9 flows forward into the New Testament in a striking way: in Luke 19:41-44 Jesus stands on the height overlooking Jerusalem, sees the siege coming, and weeps, because the city did not know the time of its visitation. The Watchman himself takes up Ezekiel's post, and unlike Ezekiel he is not forbidden tears. The Church has always read the pastoral office, bishops, priests, and in its own way every baptized witness, as heir to this charge: responsible for warning, not for results, exactly as the group discovered in session 3.

The bridegroom's loss

Ezekiel's bereavement is Scripture's window onto God's own grief over his house, said analogically, as Scripture says such things. In the same oracle where God names Ezekiel's wife the delight of his eyes, he names the sanctuary the delight of the people's eyes. The prophet loses his bride as the LORD loses his

house and, in a sense the whole book has taught us since chapter 16, his bride. Christian readers have long seen this pattern reach its full depth at Calvary, where the Father hands over the beloved Son, who freely suffers and dies in his human nature, and where the Bridegroom who wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35) enters death itself. Keep the distinction audible: the language of divine grief is Scripture's own and it is analogical; the suffering is real and it is Christ's. Present that Calvary reading as the Church's typological instinct and our application, not as a claim that Ezekiel foresaw it in detail.

Hearing that becomes doing

Ezekiel 33:31-32 is picked up almost verbatim in spirit by the New Testament: James's hearer who looks in the mirror and walks away, and Jesus' two builders in the Sermon on the Mount. The group will find these themselves in the discovery question, so do not hand them over in advance during discussion. Notice also 33:11 renewing 18:23 and 18:32 from session 7: after the fall, when despair is the real danger, God repeats his oath that he takes no pleasure in anyone's death, and this time he swears it by his own life.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Gregory the Great, d. 604

Preaching on this very watchman charge, St. Gregory teaches in substance that the watchman is stationed on a height so that he can see trouble coming from far off, and that anyone who accepts the office of speaking for God must therefore live on the heights, above the life he is calling others to leave. And then, remarkably, the pope confesses his own poverty: he fears that his tongue announces what his life does not match, and he asks his hearers to pray for him.

Homilies on Ezekiel, Book 1, Homily 11. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. The most credible watchman in your room tonight will be the one honest enough to admit the gap between what they say and how they live, and to keep speaking anyway while asking for prayers.

St. Ambrose, d. 397

When his beloved brother Satyrus died, St. Ambrose grieved openly and wrote about it. He teaches in substance that tears are not a failure of faith and that a Christian is not forbidden to weep for the dead; what transforms Christian grief is not the suppression of sorrow but the hope of resurrection, which lets love and loss and confidence in God live in the same heart at the same time.

On the Death of His Brother Satyrus. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Ezekiel's commanded silence was a unique prophetic sign, not a rule for us. For anyone in the room carrying a loss, Ambrose gives the Church's true norm: weep, and hope, together.

St. John Chrysostom, d. 407

St. John Chrysostom rebuked congregations that treated preaching as a performance to be applauded, telling them that what he wanted was not their noise but their changed lives. The rebuke is a recurring theme of his preaching; no single homily is claimed here.

Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, locus not pinned. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This is Ezekiel 33:32 wearing a Greek vestment. The question for a Bible study group is never whether the session was moving; it is whether Tuesday looked different because of it.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 1037. God predestines no one to hell; that requires a willful turning away from God and persistence in it to the end, and in her liturgy the Church implores the mercy of God who desires that all reach repentance. This is Ezekiel 33:11 in the Church's own voice.

CCC 1428. Christ's call to conversion continues to sound in the lives of the baptized; this second conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church. The watchman's trumpet does not fall silent after baptism.

CCC 1431. Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of the whole life, a return to God with all one's heart, a turning away from evil. It is what 'turn back, turn back' asks for, and it is more than being moved by a beautiful message.

CCC 2611. The prayer of faith consists not only in saying 'Lord, Lord' but in disposing the heart to do the will of the Father. Hearing that never becomes doing is exactly what this paragraph warns against.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

The opened mouth (resolve). Planted in session 3 (3:26-27), developed in session 5. Tonight it resolves at 33:21-22. Name it explicitly: the muteness that began before the fall ends the night the news arrives, and everything Ezekiel says from now on is a new kind of message. Let the group feel the payoff of having watched this since session 3.

Son of man (develop). The address keeps sounding through both chapters. Tonight the son of man carries the sign in his own bereavement. Do not resolve toward Jesus yet; just let the weight of the title accumulate.

The heart of stone (develop). Ezekiel 33:31 shows hearts set on gain even while ears enjoy the sermon. This is the clearest evidence yet that information and emotion do not change hearts. It sets up session 12 directly. Plant the ache; do not preview the transplant.

Follow the glory (rest). The glory does not appear in these chapters, and that silence is itself the point: it walked out in session 4 and has not come back. If anyone asks where the glory is tonight, smile and say that is exactly the right question. It returns in session 15.

Sealed guess (develop). Do not open the guesses; they open in session 12. But say aloud: the temple is now rubble. Whatever you wrote on night one about where God will choose to dwell, tonight the question just got much sharper.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Ezekiel 33:12-16 says a righteous man's past righteousness will not save him if he turns to sin, and a wicked man who turns will live. Doesn't that make salvation a matter of present performance, a treadmill of works?

Read what the chapter actually refuses: it refuses to let anyone coast on a past record, good or bad. That cuts both ways, and both cuts are mercy. The Catholic reading is that God's grace meets us in the present tense; we can really fall from grace and really return to it, which is why the Church has confession. The passage is not about earning; verse 11 has just grounded everything in God's own sworn desire that the wicked live. Grace first, then a real, present, free response.

Forbidding a man to mourn his own wife is psychologically cruel, and it teaches that grief is unspiritual.

It teaches neither. First, the command is explicitly a unique prophetic sign, not a norm; the text itself says Ezekiel shall be a sign to them. Second, Ezekiel is permitted to groan, only quietly: grief is not denied, it is compressed into a silence that preaches. Third, the sign's meaning is that the coming loss will be beyond the reach of mourning rituals, a numbness the exiles will actually experience. The Church's norm for grief is the opposite of suppression: Jesus wept, and St. Ambrose wept for his brother while preaching resurrection.

Session Goals

1. The group sees the hinge of the book: the dated word is verified by the event, and the message turns from warning toward hope.
2. The group feels, without being crushed by, the cost of the sign in chapter 24, and hears the Church's real teaching on grief.
3. The group recognizes the watchman charge of session 3 being renewed for a new commission.
4. The opened mouth thread, running since session 3, resolves at 33:21-22 and the group catches it.
5. The group turns Ezekiel 33:30-33 on itself and leaves resolved to be doers, not admirers, of the word.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

Ninety minutes if possible tonight; the material is heavy. Roughly: prayer and Win 12 minutes, reading plan 12 minutes, Build 50 minutes with the longest pauses at questions 3 and 5, Send and Live It 10 minutes, closing prayer 5. Protect silence after question 3; it will do more than your words.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper boxes first.
2. Then summarize the boiling pot yourself in two sentences and skip question 2's discussion.
3. Then compress question 7 into a spoken transition, reading 33:11 aloud yourself before moving to question 8.
4. Do not cut the steelman (question 5), either discovery, or the silence after question 3.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you see the beginning and the end of every story, and you dated the darkest day of your people's history before it dawned. Be with us tonight as we read hard things. Give comfort to anyone among us who is grieving, honesty to anyone among us who has been hearing your word without doing it, and to all of us the trust that your last word is never the disaster but the mercy you have sworn by your own life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. What is a delight of your eyes, a person, place, or thing whose loss you would feel physically?

W2. Have you ever been deeply moved by a talk, a song, or a retreat, and then noticed a month later that nothing had actually changed? What do you think happened?

Take the first question gently and do not force anyone to share; it opens a door the whole session will walk through.

Read

Read aloud

This is the longest span we have covered, so we sample it. Leader: summarize the boiling pot parable of 24:3-14 in two sentences before the readers begin. Reader 1: Ezekiel 24:1-2 and 24:15-24. Reader 2: Ezekiel 33:1-11. Leader: summarize 33:12-20 in a sentence. Reader 3: Ezekiel 33:21-22 and 33:30-33. Read slowly; 24:15-18 especially deserves an unhurried voice.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The Date and the Pot

1. In 24:1-2, God tells Ezekiel, sitting in Babylon, to write down this exact date, because the king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day, hundreds of miles away. Why does God insist the date be written down?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It is verification in advance. News from Jerusalem will take months to arrive on foot. When the survivor finally comes (hold that thought until chapter 33), the exiles will be able to set the dated prophecy beside the survivor's account and see that God announced the siege the day it began, not after the fact. The written date is like a receipt that can be checked later; that image is ours, and the comparison of date and report is our inference; what 33:33 says is that when this comes, they will know that a prophet has been among them. Everything Ezekiel says after tonight carries this credential.

Dig Deeper

Jewish tradition still keeps a fast on the tenth day of the month of Tevet, remembered as the day the siege of Jerusalem began. More than twenty-five centuries later, the date Ezekiel was told to write down is still on the calendar.

2. In the parable of 24:3-14, Jerusalem is a cooking pot and its people the meat, but the pot itself has a corrosion in it that will not come out, even when the pot is set empty on the coals. In session 5 we watched the prophets whitewash a cracked wall. What has changed between the whitewash and the pot?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The whitewash hid the corruption; now the fire exposes it. In session 5 the lie was still working: a coat of religious paint over a doomed structure. In chapter 24 God says, in effect, that the corruption has gone so deep into the metal that ordinary cleansing cannot reach it; even the fire of the siege will reveal it rather than remove it. This is the book's diagnosis reaching bottom, and it quietly sets up the only remedy the book will offer later: not a scrubbed pot but something entirely new. Do not say more than that tonight.

The Delight of Your Eyes

3. Read 24:15-18 again slowly. What does God ask of Ezekiel, what does he call Ezekiel's wife, and what small mercy does the text allow the prophet? Sit with this one before anyone answers.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God tells Ezekiel that the delight of his eyes will be taken at a stroke, and that evening his wife dies. He is commanded to omit the public rituals of mourning: keep his turban on, keep his sandals on, no covering of the lips, no mourners' bread. The one mercy is in verse 17: he may groan, but quietly. His grief is not denied; it is made silent and private, and that silence becomes the sermon. Notice the tenderness of the name God gives her. God knows exactly what he is asking, and names her by what she is to Ezekiel. Leave a real silence after this answer; do not rush to the next question.

4. In 24:19-24 the people ask what Ezekiel's strange behavior means for them. What is the delight of their eyes, and why will they not mourn when they lose it?

Take it as far as the room wants

Ground. Ask: what is the difference between loving a holy thing and turning it into an insurance policy? Can the same object be both?

Depth. Ezekiel's loss on the day the siege begins enacts in advance the loss of the sanctuary. Chapter 16 taught us to see the covenant as a marriage. Whose grief is Ezekiel's grief a window into?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The sanctuary itself, the pride of their power and the desire of their soul, along with the sons and daughters they left

behind in Jerusalem. They will not mourn because the loss will be beyond mourning: too total, too crushing for ritual, and they are prisoners in a foreign land with no grave to stand beside. Ezekiel's numbed, silent grief is a preview of theirs. Notice something surprising: after four sessions of watching Israel treat the temple as an idol and an insurance policy, God here names it with real tenderness, the delight of their eyes. Both are true. They loved the temple wrongly and they loved it really, and the losing of it will break their hearts.

5. Now the hardest question of the night. Let one person state this objection as strongly as they can, and let it stand in the air before anyone answers.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. A skeptic reads Ezekiel 24 and says: this is a God who kills a man's wife to make a rhetorical point, and then forbids his tears. You cannot soften it by saying she happened to die, because the text presents God announcing it and doing it. A deity who uses a woman's death and her husband's grief as a sermon illustration is not mysterious, he is monstrous, and no amount of theology should make you comfortable with that.

Answering from the text. Do not answer this cheaply, because the text does not. Three things can honestly be said. First, read whose loss this is. In the same oracle God names the sanctuary the delight of the people's eyes; the whole book since chapter 16 has shown God as the wounded husband of an unfaithful bride. Ezekiel's bereavement is not an illustration bolted onto God's message from outside; it is a share in God's own loss. The sign works because Scripture lets the prophet's grief stand as an image of God's own, which is prophetic language and not a claim that God suffers as we do. Second, the no-mourning command does not teach that grief is wrong; Ezekiel may groan, and the command's meaning is that the coming catastrophe will be beyond the rituals of mourning, which is how many readers understand verse 23's picture of exiles who do not mourn or weep but waste away. Third, and honestly: we do not have a formula that explains the timing of any particular death, hers or anyone's. The Church does not pretend to. What Christians can say is that Ezekiel's loss points toward the God who, in Christ, enters human suffering and death himself. At Calvary the Son freely lays down his life, suffering and dying in his human nature, and the Bridegroom stands weeping at a tomb before he ever opens one; the Father does not literally lose the Son. That reading of Ezekiel toward the cross is our application in the Church's ancient manner of reading, not a hidden meaning Ezekiel spelled out, but it is the only answer that has ever been big enough for the objection.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Let the objection stand at full strength first. The answer has three honest parts: Ezekiel's loss mirrors God's own loss of his sanctuary and his bride, so the prophet is sharing God's grief, not being used as a prop; the command restrains the rituals of mourning as a sign of the exiles' coming numbness, it does not condemn grief itself; and the deep Christian answer is the cross, where God himself gives up the delight of his eyes. Say plainly that some weight remains, and that the Church prefers an honest ache to a tidy formula.

The Watchman, Again

Live discovery

Send the group back into their own Bibles: find the earlier passage in Ezekiel where God first made him a watchman. When they have it, read the two charges side by side and hunt for differences.

Let them find it. Ezekiel 3:16-21

6. Chapter 33 opens with a charge that should sound very familiar. Where have we heard this before, and what is different this time?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It is the charge from session 3, Ezekiel 3:16-21, renewed almost word for word. Two differences matter. First, 33:2-6 begins with a general parable anyone can accept: any city sets a watchman, and if he blows the trumpet, responsibility passes to the hearers. The office is explained before it is assigned. Second, the timing: the first charge came before the catastrophe, when the watchman's job was to warn of it. This renewal comes as the catastrophe arrives, which means the watchman is being recommissioned for whatever comes next. God does not retire his prophet at the moment of vindication; he re-sends him. Same responsibility as session 3: the warning is his, the results are not.

7. In 33:10 the exiles finally say something the whole book has been waiting for: our sins are upon us, we waste away because of them, how then can we live? Look carefully at God's answer in 33:11. What does God swear, and what does he swear by?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He swears by his own life, as I live, that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn and live, and then he pleads: turn back, turn back, why will you die? This renews the discovery of session 7, Ezekiel 18:23 and 18:32, but escalated: now it is an oath, sworn on God's own life, delivered at the precise moment despair becomes the real danger. Before the fall, the temptation was complacency; after the fall, it is hopelessness, and God meets each with the same heart. The Catechism says the same thing in its own voice: God predestines no one to be lost, and the whole call of Christ is a continuing call to turn.

The City Has Fallen

8. Read 33:21-22 once more. What news arrives, what happened to Ezekiel the evening before it arrived, and what long-running thread of our study just resolved?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A fugitive from Jerusalem arrives with four words the whole book has been driving toward: the city has fallen. And the evening before he comes, the hand of the LORD opens Ezekiel's mouth, ending the muteness imposed back in 3:26-27, exactly as God promised in 24:25-27. This is the thread we have called the opened mouth, planted in session 3, and tonight it resolves. Ask the group what it means that the mouth opens now, of all moments. The answer: because the message is about to change. The watchman who could speak only warning becomes, from chapter 34 onward, the herald of a shepherd, a new heart, bones that rise, and glory that comes home. When judgment has said everything it has to say, God opens a mouth for hope.

Dig Deeper

Compare 24:14, where God says his word shall come to pass and he will do it, with 33:33, where he says that when this comes, they will know a prophet has been among them. The fall of the city is the terrible proof that every promise in the rest of the book can be trusted.

The Lovely Song

Live discovery

Split into two groups. One group searches the opening chapter of James for the hearer who is not a doer; the other searches the end of the Sermon on the Mount for the two builders. Each group reports what image their passage uses and what it says the hearing-without-doing actually costs.

Let them find it. James 1:22-25; Matthew 7:24-27

9. Read 33:30-33. Ezekiel is finally popular: people invite each other to come hear the word of the LORD, they sit in front of him, they are moved, and verse 31 says they do not do it, because their hearts are set on their own gain. To them he is like someone who sings love songs beautifully. Where does the New Testament pick up this exact person, the hearer who does not do?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

James 1:22-25 gives the man who looks at his face in a mirror and walks away and forgets, and warns that hearers who are not doers deceive themselves. Matthew 7:24-27 gives the two builders: hearing plus doing builds on rock, hearing alone builds on sand, and the difference only shows when the storm comes. Now turn it on ourselves, gently but really: it is possible to treat Ezekiel, and this study, as a lovely playlist, to enjoy hearing it every week while our hearts stay set on our own gain. Verse 31 is the book's quiet confirmation that being stirred is not the same as being changed, and it points at the question this whole study is walking toward: what would it take for the heart itself to be different?

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where in your life are you currently enjoying God's word like a good song, moved but unchanged, and what would doing it actually look like this week?

S2. Who is God asking you to keep speaking to, or keep showing up for, even though the results are completely out of your hands?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Turn one hearing into one doing within 48 hours: pick a single concrete thing tonight's session pointed at, a conversation you have been avoiding, an apology, an act of generosity, and do it before the week is half over.
2. Pray for someone who has lost the delight of their eyes. Name one person you know who is grieving, and this week send them a message, visit them, or have a Mass offered for their intention.
3. Each morning this week, pray the sense of Ezekiel 33:11 back to God in your own words: you take no pleasure in my death; today I turn back to you.
4. Memorize the verse below and let its double plea, turn back, turn back, be the words you reach for when you fail this week.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 33:11 (excerpt)

"... As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?"

Ezekiel 33:11 (excerpt)

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you swore by your own life that you take no pleasure in anyone's death. We believe you. For everything we have heard and not done, forgive us, and make us doers of your word. Comfort those among us who grieve, open our mouths as you opened your prophet's, and when everything we leaned on falls, be yourself our sanctuary, until we see your glory come home. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 24:1-2** the dated siege
- **Ezekiel 24:3-14** the corroded pot, leader summarizes
- **Ezekiel 24:15-24** the delight of your eyes
- **Ezekiel 24:25-27** the promise of the opened mouth
- **Ezekiel 33:1-11** watchman renewed; the oath of mercy
- **Ezekiel 33:12-20** present fidelity, leader summarizes
- **Ezekiel 33:21-22** the city has fallen; the mouth opened
- **Ezekiel 33:30-33** the lovely song

Callback

- **Ezekiel 3:16-21** the first watchman charge, session 3
- **Ezekiel 3:26-27** the muteness imposed, session 3
- **Ezekiel 18:23, 32** no pleasure in death, session 7

Discovery passages

- **James 1:22-25** the hearer at the mirror
- **Matthew 7:24-27** the two builders

Leader background only

- **Luke 19:41-44** the Watchman weeps over Jerusalem
- **John 11:35** Jesus wept

Terms

- ***tsophah***. watchman, lookout posted on the walls or a height
- ***machmad***. a precious, desirable thing; the delight of the eyes

Catechism

- **CCC 1037**. God predestines no one to hell
- **CCC 1428**. conversion is an uninterrupted task
- **CCC 1431**. interior repentance, a radical turning of the heart
- **CCC 2611**. not saying Lord, Lord, but doing the Father's will

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 10. The Pride of Tyre

Reading: Ezekiel 25-28 (focus 28:1-19), with 29-32 surveyed

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that the God of exiled Israel judges every nation by one moral standard, and that the prince of Tyre's fall is a portrait of what pride does to any creature that says 'I am a god.'

Catholic Touchstone

Pride, which the tradition often calls the root of the vices, and humility, the truthful acceptance of creaturehood, as its proper remedy; God is Lord of the nations, not a tribal deity defeated with his people.

Tonight the study leaves Israel for eight chapters and follows God's word out over the whole map. Between the announcement that the siege has begun (chapter 24) and the arrival of the news that the city has fallen (chapter 33, which we read last week because the book's hinge belongs together), Ezekiel turns to the nations: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, then Tyre at length, then Egypt. The group should feel two things. First, the exiles' God is not a defeated local god; he judges the nations that gloated over Jerusalem, and he judges them by the same standard he used on Jerusalem. Second, in the prince of Tyre they should recognize something uncomfortably close to home: real gifts, real wisdom, real success, and a heart that quietly rewrites the ownership papers. The Eden imagery of 28:11-19 lets the group see Tyre's fall as a re-enactment of the oldest fall of all. Keep the tone honest rather than gleeful; chapter 27 is a genuine lament, and God is on record in this very book that he takes no pleasure in the death of anyone.

What You Need to Know

Why the oracles against the nations sit here

Chapters 25 to 32 are placed between the moment the siege of Jerusalem begins (24:1-2) and the moment the fugitive arrives with the news that the city has fallen (33:21). While Jerusalem burns offstage, the book deliberately turns the camera outward. The effect is theological: the God whose own temple is being destroyed is not diminished by it. He is presiding over the whole board. Note for continuity that we read chapter 33 last session, so the group already knows how this waiting period ends; tonight fills in what God was saying during the silence.

Tyre, the untouchable city

Tyre was a Phoenician city built partly on an island about half a mile offshore, protected by walls and by the sea, and enriched by a trading network that reached across the Mediterranean; her colonies included Carthage. She was, by every worldly measure, the safest and cleverest city in the region. Ancient sources report that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for around thirteen years and never sacked the island city; it finally fell in 332 BC when Alexander the Great built a causeway out to the island using rubble, an event that fits the scraping and casting into the sea language of chapter 26 strikingly well. Be honest with the group about the history: 26:3 speaks of many nations coming in waves, and the text

itself shifts from Nebuchadnezzar by name (26:7) to an unnamed 'they' (26:12). More remarkable still, Ezekiel 29:17-20 openly records that Nebuchadnezzar's long labor against Tyre won him no plunder, and gives him Egypt as wages instead. A book of propaganda would never audit itself like that.

Prince and king: the two-level shape of chapter 28

Verses 1-10 are addressed to the *nagid*, the prince or ruler of Tyre, and read as political: a wise, wealthy, mortal man who has told himself he is a god. Verses 11-19 are a lament over the *melek*, the king of Tyre, and suddenly the imagery goes somewhere no Phoenician throne room can follow: Eden, the garden of God; a cherub; the holy mountain; created blameless until iniquity was found in him. Interpreters have long sensed two levels here. At minimum, Ezekiel is dressing Tyre's fall in the costume of the primal fall, so that the group sees one pattern running from Eden to Tyre to us.

The fall-of-Satan reading, handled honestly

A number of the Fathers heard behind the king of Tyre a description of the fall of Satan (Tertullian treats the passage this way in *Against Marcion* II.10, and Origen in *De Principiis* I.5.4; verify both before naming them aloud), the created, beautiful, blameless one in whom iniquity was found. The Church has never defined that Ezekiel 28 describes the devil's fall; the literal referent is the king of Tyre, and the literal sense is the foundation (CCC 116). But the Church does teach as a matter of faith that the devil and the other demons were created naturally good and became evil by their own free choice (CCC 391-392), and the Fathers found in this passage a fitting portrait of that mystery. Present it exactly that way: literal sense first, traditional resonance honestly labelled as a resonance, no manufactured certainty in either direction.

The refrain

Count it with the group: some version of 'then they will know that I am the LORD' closes oracle after oracle in these chapters, and it is spoken over pagan nations, not only Israel. Judgment in Ezekiel always aims past itself at knowledge of God. That matters for the sealed guesses waiting in the envelope: the judgment in these oracles is severe and really enacted, and it is ordered past itself to recognition.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Eden replayed

The lament of 28:11-19 deliberately reaches back to Genesis 2-3: the garden of God, precious stones, a cherub on the holy mountain, a creature blameless from the day of its creation until iniquity was found in it. The serpent's promise in Genesis 3:5, 'you will be like God,' is exactly the sentence the prince of Tyre has spoken over himself. Isaiah 14:12-15, the taunt over the king of Babylon who says 'I will ascend to heaven... I will make myself like the Most High,' is the same pattern in a second prophet, which is why we send the group to both texts tonight.

The great inversion

The New Testament answers 'I am a god' with its exact photographic negative. Philippians 2:5-11: Christ Jesus, who truly was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself and humbled himself, and therefore God has highly exalted him. The prince of Tyre is a man grasping upward at godhood and being thrown down; Christ is God stooping downward into manhood and being lifted up. Jesus also says in Luke 10:18 that he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven, precisely as his disciples return from humble, delegated service. And Revelation 18 reuses Ezekiel's lament over Tyre almost scene for scene, merchants and mariners weeping over a fallen

commercial empire, to describe the fall of 'Babylon.' John clearly read these chapters as a standing pattern, not a spent prophecy.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Augustine, d. 430

St. Augustine's account of the two cities turns on two loves: a love of self carried as far as contempt for God, which builds the earthly city, and a love of God carried as far as contempt for self, which builds the heavenly one. Pride, on his reading, is not one vice among many but the founding act of the city that ends in ruin.

The City of God, Book XIV, chapter 28. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. The prince of Tyre is the earthly city compressed into a single man. Every heart in the room is, tonight, laying foundation stones for one city or the other.

St. John Cassian, d. c. 435

Cassian, writing for monks, teaches in substance that pride is the most dangerous of all the vices because it attacks not beginners but the strong. It waits until the other sins are beaten and then corrupts the victory itself, whispering that our progress is our own achievement. It was pride that cast down the angel from heaven, and its remedy is to remember, gift by gift, that everything we have and everything we are is received.

Institutes, Book 12. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This lands hardest on the genuinely gifted people in the room, the ones whose competence, like the prince of Tyre's, is real. Pride does not need false achievements; it prefers true ones.

St. Catherine of Siena, d. 1380

Her biographer, Bl. Raymond of Capua, records that in prayer the Lord taught Catherine the whole of wisdom in two short clauses: he is the One who is, and she, of herself, is the one who is not. Everything she was, down to her existence itself, was received from him moment by moment, and Raymond presents this single truth as the foundation of all her holiness.

Bl. Raymond of Capua, Life of St. Catherine of Siena. Summary of her teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This is the exact inverse of 'I am a god.' The sentence the prince of Tyre could not bear to say became the source of Catherine's freedom and joy. Creaturehood accepted is not humiliation; it is sanity.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 391-392. Behind humanity's fall stands a fallen angel: the devil and the other demons were created naturally good by God and became evil by their own free, irrevocable choice, the choice Scripture echoes in the seduction 'you will be like God.'

CCC 1866. The tradition names pride among the capital sins, the vices that engender other sins and other vices.

CCC 2113. Idolatry is not only false pagan worship; it consists in divinizing what is not God, and the paragraph names power, pleasure, money, and the state among the candidates. Tyre divinized commerce and self.

CCC 2559. Humility is the foundation of prayer; the one who prays comes before God as a beggar who receives everything. This is the posture the prince of Tyre refused.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

The LORD is there (develop). The refrain 'then they will know that I am the LORD' is spoken tonight over pagan nations. Quietly note it each time it appears; the thread is widening from a temple, to exiles, to the whole earth. Do not resolve anything.

Son of man (develop). Tonight the thread gets its sharpest contrast yet. God has called Ezekiel 'son of man,' mere mortal, for eight sessions; now a mortal announces 'I am a god' and God answers 'you are but a man, and no god.' Let question 8 do this work; do not preview the New Testament payoff.

The heart of stone (develop). Chapter 28 is saturated with heart language: 'your heart is proud' (28:2, 28:5), 'your heart was proud because of your beauty' (28:17). Pride is what the stone heart is made of. Name the connection briefly after question 4.

Follow the glory (rest). No glory movement tonight. If someone asks where the glory is during these chapters, smile and say the book has not forgotten it.

Whose right it is (rest). Resting. The crown question from session 8 stays on the shelf tonight.

Sealed guess (develop). Do not open the envelopes; they open in session 12. If the guesses come up, note only that tonight the question of where God chooses to dwell just got bigger than Israel, since he is evidently at work among all the nations.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Ezekiel 26 says Nebuchadnezzar would destroy Tyre, and history says he besieged it for years and never took the island. So this is a failed prophecy, and the book even admits it in 29:17-20.

Read the chapter's own grammar first. 26:3 announces many nations coming in waves; 26:7-11 describes Nebuchadnezzar by name attacking the mainland settlements; at 26:12 the subject shifts to an unnamed 'they,' and many readers take that later wave to be the one which scrapes the city and casts her stones and timber into the sea, which is a startlingly good description of what Alexander's engineers did in 332 BC. The grammar does not name Alexander, so offer this as a plausible reading and leave the tension in 29:17-20 standing. And far from being an embarrassment, 29:17-20 is evidence of the book's honesty: it records openly that Nebuchadnezzar got no spoil from Tyre. A text willing to say that is not cooking its books. Prophecy in the Church's understanding is God's living word about covenant realities, not a mechanical almanac, and Ezekiel's editors plainly did not think the record needed hiding.

From the opposite direction, a well-catechized participant may say: Ezekiel 28 is really about Satan, so all this talk about a Phoenician king misses the point.

Gently reverse the order. The literal sense is the foundation of all the others (CCC 116), and the literal referent here is the king of Tyre; the oracle is dated, located, and political. The fall-of-Satan reading found in many Fathers is a real and venerable resonance, and the Church does teach the free fall of the angels (CCC 391-392), but the Church has never defined that this passage describes it. Both readings can be held with their proper weight; neither should erase the other.

Session Goals

1. Trace the because-therefore-know pattern through chapter 25 and conclude that God judges the nations morally, not ethnically, with knowledge of himself as the stated aim.
2. Identify the prince of Tyre's actual sin in 28:1-10: not his real wisdom or wealth, but the sentence his heart speaks over them, 'I am a god.'
3. Discover through Genesis 3 and Isaiah 14 that Tyre's fall re-enacts one primal pattern of creaturely pride, and weigh the traditional reading of 28:11-19 with honest latitude.
4. Feel the force of the 'nationalist propaganda' objection and answer it from the text itself.
5. Sharpen the son of man thread by contrast: God's spokesman is the one who accepts being called merely a man.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

Roughly: prayer and Win, 12 minutes; reading block with leader surveys, 15 minutes; Build questions 1 to 10, about 45 minutes, with the discovery (Q5) and the steelman (Q7) as the two summits; Send, Live It, and closing prayer, 12 minutes. The reading load is the biggest risk tonight, so lean hard on the survey summaries rather than reading chapters 26, 27, and 29 to 32 aloud.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. First, cut the chapter 27 portion of question 3 to a single leader sentence: Tyre is portrayed as a magnificent trading ship that sinks, and even God's oracle sounds like a lament.
2. Second, compress question 9 to the leader simply reading 29:3 aloud and asking the one-line follow-up.
3. Third, drop both Dig Deeper boxes.
4. Fourth, fold question 10 into the closing: read 28:25-26 aloud yourself just before the closing prayer and name the mercy in one sentence.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you are the One who is, and everything we are is your gift. We come tonight as creatures, glad to be creatures, to hear your word about pride and its cure. Give us honest eyes for the text and for ourselves. Guard this group from every whisper that says our gifts are our own making, and teach us the freedom of receiving everything from your hand. We ask this through Christ our Lord, who humbled himself for our sake. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. Tell us about a time you got genuinely good at something and it started to go to your head, or almost did. How did you notice?

W2. When you hear the word pride, is your first instinct that it names something good or something bad? Why do you think that is?

Both questions should stay light and personal; the second one surfaces the ambiguity of the modern word, which the text will clarify soon enough.

Read

Read aloud

One reader takes Ezekiel 25:1-7 so the group hears the oracle pattern once in full; the leader then surveys the rest of 25 through 27 in about two minutes using the prep notes. Then three readers split Ezekiel 28:1-19: verses 1-5, 6-10, and 11-19. Hold 28:25-26 back; it gets read at question 10. Chapters 29 to 32 are surveyed by the leader at question 9, with only 29:3 read aloud.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The pattern

1. You just heard the oracle against Ammon. Chapter 25 contains four of these short oracles: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia. Skim them together. What repeating pattern do you see, and what does each nation actually get judged for?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The pattern is because, therefore, then you will know that I am the LORD. And the 'because' is always moral: Ammon said 'Aha!' over the sanctuary when it was profaned (25:3), Moab sneered that Judah was no different from all the other nations (25:8), Edom took vengeance (25:12), Philistia acted with never-ending hostility (25:15). Nobody is judged for being foreign. They are judged for malice, gloating, and contempt, and the stated goal of judgment,

every single time, is that they will know who the LORD is.

2. Put yourself in an ancient neighbor's sandals. Jerusalem has fallen, or is falling. In the logic of that world, what would Judah's defeat prove about Judah's God? And what is Ezekiel claiming instead?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

In the ancient world, when your nation lost, your god lost; a burned temple meant a defeated deity. The nations gloating in chapter 25 are running on exactly that logic. Ezekiel's claim is outrageous by those rules: the God whose city is falling is at that very moment issuing verdicts over Ammon, Tyre, and Egypt. He is not a defeated tribal god; he is the judge of every nation on the map. The group met this claim in session 1 when the glory appeared in Babylon; tonight it goes global.

Dig Deeper

Compare Ezekiel 25:3 with Ezekiel 36:2, coming in two sessions: the same gloating 'Aha!' God hears what the nations say.

Tyre: the city that could not sink

3. Ammon got seven verses; Tyre gets three whole chapters. From 26:2, what is Tyre's specific sin? And from the leader's summary of chapter 27, how does the oracle actually portray her?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Tyre's sin in 26:2 is gloating over Jerusalem's fall as a market opportunity: the gate of the peoples is broken, and Tyre expects to profit from the wreckage. It is greed wearing grief's shoes at a funeral. Yet chapter 27 portrays Tyre as a magnificent trading ship, built from the best materials of every nation, genuinely beautiful, genuinely skilled, and the oracle over her sinking is cast as a lament. God's word does not sneer at what Tyre built; it grieves what Tyre became. That combination, real admiration and real judgment, is worth sitting with.

Dig Deeper

Centuries later, John reuses this exact lament, merchants and mariners weeping over a fallen commercial empire, in Revelation 18:9-19, aimed at 'Babylon.' The apostles read Ezekiel's Tyre as a standing pattern, not a spent headline.

4. Read 28:1-10 closely. Notice that verses 3 to 5 concede that the prince really is wise and really did build his wealth. So what exactly is his sin? Where, physically, does the text locate it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The sin is not his wisdom or his wealth; the text grants that both are real. The sin is the sentence his heart speaks over them: 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods.' The text locates it in the heart, three times over (verses 2, 5, and later 17). Pride here is an accurate inventory with a false owner's name written on it. He counted his gifts correctly and then signed them himself. Notice too that this is heart language again; the book has been diagnosing hearts

since chapter 11, and pride is what the stone heart is made of.

Live discovery

Split into two groups. Group one, find Genesis 3:1-5 and read it looking for what the serpent actually promises. Group two, find Isaiah 14:12-15 and read it looking for what the king of Babylon says in his heart. Then each group reports the echoes with Ezekiel 28.

Let them find it. Genesis 3:1-5; Isaiah 14:12-15

5. This sentence, 'I will be like a god,' did not start in Tyre. Let's find where it started, and where else the prophets heard it.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Group one should find the serpent's promise: 'you will be like God.' That is the original sales pitch, and the prince of Tyre has simply bought it. Group two should find the same five-fold 'I will' ambition in Babylon's king: I will ascend, I will set my throne on high, I will make myself like the Most High, answered by 'you are brought down.' Three texts, one disease. Every fall in Scripture, from Eden to Babylon to Tyre, is the same fall: a creature trying to occupy the Creator's chair. The group has just discovered that the oracle, while addressed to Tyre's ruler, exposes in him a pattern old as the garden.

6. Now the strange part. Reread 28:11-19, the lament over the king of Tyre. List the images that seem to have nothing to do with a Phoenician harbor city. Why do you think Ezekiel describes a human king this way?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. If the group is tiring, land the simple point: Ezekiel deliberately paints Tyre's fall to look like Adam's fall, one pattern, one disease.

Ground. Draw out verse 17: 'your heart was proud because of your beauty.' The gifts were from God; the corruption was in what the heart did with them.

Depth. Ask what it means that the passage is framed as a lament God commands to be raised. Even here, judgment sounds like grief. Connect to 18:32, which the group already knows by heart.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The images: Eden, the garden of God; covering cherub; the holy mountain of God; precious stones; created blameless 'from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.' No Phoenician king ever stood in Eden. At minimum, Ezekiel is dressing Tyre's fall in the costume of the primal fall, so we see one pattern from the garden onward. And many Fathers of the Church heard something more behind the king: a description of the fall of Satan himself, the beautiful, blameless creature in whom iniquity was found. The Church has never defined that this passage describes the devil's fall; the literal referent is the king of Tyre. But the Church does teach that the devil was created good and fell by his own free choice, and the Fathers found this passage a fitting portrait of that mystery. Hold both levels with their proper weight.

The hard question

7. Before we go further, we need to hear the strongest objection to these eight chapters. Listen to it properly before anyone answers.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. A thoughtful skeptic says: be honest about what chapters 25 to 32 are. Every ancient Near Eastern nation produced oracles cursing its enemies; Egypt and Babylon have left us shelves of them. This is a defeated, humiliated people comforting itself by imagining its god smashing the neighbors who laughed at it. The pattern is embarrassingly human: we lost, so our god will get you. Calling this divine revelation instead of nationalist grievance literature in religious dress is special pleading, and you would say so instantly if you found the identical genre in any other nation's scriptures.

Answering from the text. Take the objection seriously, then test it against the text. First, grievance literature flatters its own side, but this book spent twenty-four chapters judging Israel first and hardest; the temple itself was condemned before any foreign nation was. Second, the standard applied to the nations, pride, violence, gloating, is exactly the standard applied to Jerusalem; nobody here is judged for ethnicity, and Israel is not judged more gently. Third, the refrain gives the game away: the aim, repeated over pagan nations, is that they will know that I am the LORD, which is a strange goal for a curse whose fantasy is annihilation. Fourth, propaganda does not audit itself, but Ezekiel 29:17-20 candidly records that the great siege of Tyre won Nebuchadnezzar nothing. And fifth, this same book has already sworn, by God's own life, that he takes no pleasure in the death of anyone (18:32, 33:11). The genre may look familiar; the God inside it does not behave like the genre.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The objection is real and should be felt: these chapters do share a form with ancient curse-oracles. But the content breaks the mold at every point where it matters: Israel judged first and hardest, one moral standard for everyone, knowledge of God as the stated goal, unflattering honesty about outcomes, and a God on oath that he does not enjoy any of this. Grievance literature exists to make us feel better about ourselves; Ezekiel's oracles exist to make everyone, Israel included, know the LORD.

The name and the counter-name

8. For eight sessions, what has God called Ezekiel every time he speaks to him? Now look at 28:2 and 28:9. What is the book preaching just through its names?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God calls Ezekiel 'son of man,' mortal, mere human, dozens of times across the book. Tonight a man announces 'I am a god,' and God answers: you are but a man, and no god. The book's naming convention is a sermon. God's chosen spokesman is the one who accepts being called merely a man; God's judged enemy is the man who refuses it. Creaturehood accepted is the ground on which God builds; creaturehood denied is the cliff every proud creature goes over. Keep this contrast in your pocket; the title 'son of man' has further to travel before this study ends.

Egypt, surveyed

9. Chapters 29 to 32 turn to Egypt; the leader will summarize. But listen to Pharaoh's one line in 29:3, the great dragon in the Nile who says: 'My Nile is my own; I made it.' Same disease as Tyre, or a different one?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Same disease, different symptom. Tyre said 'I am a god'; Pharaoh says 'I made it,' claiming creatorship of the river that in fact made Egypt. Pride either promotes the self to divinity or demotes gifts to achievements, and usually both. The Nile was a pure gift flowing past Pharaoh's door every morning of his life, and he signed it. Ask the room quietly: what is the Nile in your life, the gift so constant you have started to believe you made it?

The mercy in the middle

10. Now read the two verses we saved: Ezekiel 28:25-26, tucked between Tyre and Egypt. What are they doing in the middle of eight chapters of judgment?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They are a seed of the whole second half of the book: God will gather scattered Israel, they will dwell securely, build houses, plant vineyards, and then they will know that I am the LORD their God. Notice the refrain has changed its ending: not just 'the LORD' but 'the LORD their God.' Buried in the judgment chapters is the promise that judgment is not the destination. The destination is a gathered people dwelling safely with their God, which is precisely the question sitting sealed in an envelope from session 1. Say no more than that.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where in your life is the line thinnest right now between healthy confidence and 'my Nile is my own; I made it'?

S2. Who do you know who carries real gifts without either false modesty or self-worship? What do they actually do differently?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Each night this week, before sleep, name one specific gift from that day, your mind, a skill, a person, your existence itself, and thank the Giver for it out loud. One sentence is enough. This is Cassian's remedy in miniature: remembering, gift by gift, that everything is received.
2. Do one act of service this week that no one will ever credit to you, and tell no one. Let something good exist with your name deliberately left off it.
3. Pray the Litany of Humility once this week, slowly. If a line feels impossible to mean, pray it anyway and tell God it feels impossible; that honesty is itself humility beginning.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 28:26

"And they shall dwell securely in it, and they shall build houses and plant vineyards. They shall dwell securely, when I execute judgments upon all their neighbors who have treated them with contempt. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God."

Ezekiel 28:26

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Father, you are God and we are not, and tonight we thank you that this is good news. Everything we have, we received; everything we are, you sustain moment by moment. Deliver us from the old whisper of the garden, from signing our own gifts, from gloating over anyone's fall. Give us the freedom of your saints, who found their joy in being creatures of a good Creator. Gather us, as you promised, to dwell securely with you, that we may know that you are the LORD our God. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 25:1-7** read aloud; pattern oracle (Ammon)
- **Ezekiel 25:8-17** leader survey: Moab, Edom, Philistia
- **Ezekiel 26:1-6** Tyre's gloating; leader survey of 26-27
- **Ezekiel 28:1-10** read aloud; the prince
- **Ezekiel 28:11-19** read aloud; the lament over the king
- **Ezekiel 28:25-26** held back until question 10

Discovery passages

- **Genesis 3:1-5** group one
- **Isaiah 14:12-15** group two

Egypt survey

- **Ezekiel 29:3** read aloud at question 9
- **Ezekiel 29:17-20** leader reference; the Tyre audit

Fulfillment (leader reference and Dig Deeper)

- **Philippians 2:5-11** the inversion of 'I am a god'
- **Luke 10:18** Satan falling like lightning
- **Revelation 18:9-19** Tyre's lament reused for Babylon
- **Ezekiel 18:32; 33:11** canon from prior sessions, for the steelman

Terms

- ****nagid.**** prince, ruler; the addressee of 28:1-10
- ****melek.**** king; the figure lamented in 28:11-19
- ****superbia.**** the Latin tradition's word for pride, the capital sin

Catechism

- **CCC 391-392.** the free fall of the angels
- **CCC 1866.** pride among the capital sins
- **CCC 2113.** idolatry divinizes what is not God
- **CCC 2559.** humility, the foundation of prayer
- **CCC 116.** the literal sense is the foundation of the other senses

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 11. I Myself Will Shepherd Them

Reading: Ezekiel 34

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that God fires the false shepherds of Israel, promises to shepherd his flock personally and through 'my servant David', and finds for themselves how strongly Jesus' shepherd teaching echoes and fulfils this chapter.

Catholic Touchstone

Christ the Good Shepherd, who shepherds his flock personally and through the pastors he configures to himself, so that the failure of human shepherds is answered not by no shepherds but by God shepherding in person.

After the darkness of the hinge (session 9) and the judgment of the nations (session 10), tonight the book turns its face toward hope, and it starts with a firing. Ezekiel 34 is God's performance review of every king, priest, and prophet who was supposed to tend Israel and instead fed on her. Then comes the takeover: a cascade of first person promises in verses 11 to 16 where God personally assumes every duty the shepherds failed, followed by the startling verses 23 to 24 where the same shepherding is handed to 'my servant David', dead for nearly four centuries. That tension, God himself and David at once, is the engine of the night, and the group will resolve it themselves when they open John 10, Matthew 25, and Luke 19 and find Jesus speaking Ezekiel 34 in the first person. This chapter also quietly develops the 'whose right it is' thread from session 8 and the everlasting covenant thread from session 6. Keep the sealed guesses sealed; this chapter whispers their answer but does not open them. That happens next week.

What You Need to Know

Shepherd was a royal job title

Across the ancient Near East, 'shepherd' was standard language for kings; Hammurabi called himself the shepherd of his people. In Israel the image had extra bite because David really had been a shepherd boy before he was king, and 2 Samuel 5:2 makes the connection explicit: the tribes tell David that the LORD said to him, you shall be shepherd of my people Israel. So when Ezekiel 34 opens with 'the shepherds of Israel', the exiles hear it instantly: this is about the rulers whose failure landed them all in Babylon. The chapter does not name priests or prophets, so keep the primary indictment where Ezekiel puts it, on Israel's rulers, and let the wider application to failed leadership be application.

One Hebrew word does double duty

The Hebrew verb *ra'ah* means both to shepherd and to feed or pasture. The chapter leans on this constantly: the shepherds who should have fed the flock fed themselves. When God says he himself will shepherd them, he is also saying he himself will feed them. Keep that in your pocket; it makes the eventual New Testament landing points (a shepherd who says 'I am the bread of life' and a risen Lord

who tells Peter 'feed my sheep') feel less like a leap and more like a straight line. Do not hand the group that Eucharistic connection in advance; if someone finds it, enjoy it.

A textual note on verse 16

In verse 16 the Hebrew Masoretic text reads that God will destroy the fat and the strong, while the ancient Greek and Syriac versions read that he will watch over them. The RSV family prints 'watch over'. Either way the verse ends the same: 'I will feed them in justice', and verses 17 to 22 make clear that the strong sheep who abuse the weak face real judgment. If a sharp reader has a Bible with a footnote here, welcome the question; it is a chance to say honestly that the Church receives Scripture through a real textual history and that both readings land in the same place, justice for the flock.

The chapter's structure

It helps to see four movements before you lead.

- Verses 1 to 10: the indictment. The shepherds fed themselves; the flock scattered; God is against the shepherds and will require his sheep at their hand.
- Verses 11 to 16: the takeover. A dozen first person promises; God assumes every failed duty point for point.
- Verses 17 to 24: judgment within the flock, then the promise of one shepherd, 'my servant David', a prince in their midst.
- Verses 25 to 31: the covenant of peace. Security, showers of blessing, Eden-like fruitfulness, and the covenant formula: my sheep, my pasture, and I am your God.

Where this lands pastorally

You almost certainly have people in the room who have been hurt, bored, or scandalized by shepherds of the Church, and some of the news stories of their lifetime are exactly the sins of verses 2 to 4. Do not manage that away. Ezekiel 34 is God's own fury at bad shepherds, which means an angry or wounded young adult is standing closer to this chapter than a complacent one. The good news of the night is not that shepherds are fine; it is that the flock belongs to God, that he judges shepherds precisely because the sheep are his, and that he came in person to do the job himself.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The shepherd thread through the Old Testament

Israel's story is shepherded from the start: Abel, Abraham, Moses keeping Jethro's flock when the bush burns, and David taken 'from the sheepfolds' to shepherd Jacob (Psalm 78:70-72). Psalm 23 puts the image on every Israelite's lips: the LORD is my shepherd. Jeremiah 23:1-6, a generation before Ezekiel, delivers almost the same indictment, woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter, followed by almost the same promise, God will gather the flock himself and raise up a righteous Branch for David. Ezekiel 34 gathers all of this up and sharpens it.

Fulfillment: the shepherd chapter Jesus keeps quoting

The New Testament treats Ezekiel 34 as a script Jesus deliberately performs. In John 10 he takes the divine role for himself, 'I am the good shepherd', and takes verse 23's promise too, 'one flock, one shepherd'. Luke 19:10, 'the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost', is nearly a quotation of Ezekiel 34:16. Matthew 25:31-33 shows the Son of man doing exactly what God reserved to himself in 34:17, judging between sheep and sheep. And in John 21 the risen Christ hands the shepherding on: feed my lambs, tend my sheep. Peter closes the loop in 1 Peter 5:1-4, charging elders to shepherd God's flock not

for shameful gain and not by domineering, the precise sins of Ezekiel 34, under Christ 'the chief Shepherd'. Divine shepherding and commissioned under-shepherds are not rivals in this chapter; they are its two promises, and the New Testament keeps them both.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Augustine, d. 430

Preaching an entire sermon on this very chapter, St. Augustine turns Ezekiel's indictment on the clergy of his own day, himself included: bad shepherds feed themselves on the flock, taking the milk and the wool, the honor and the support, while neglecting the sheep. But he will not let the flock despair over its pastors. Christ, the one true Shepherd, never stops feeding his sheep, and the sheep who cling to him are never left at the mercy of hirelings.

Sermon 46, On the Shepherds. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone in the room wounded by the Church's shepherds: a Doctor of the Church read this chapter the same way, aimed it at his own office, and found the same hope in it.

St. Gregory the Great, d. 604

St. Gregory teaches, in substance, that the care of souls is the art of arts, and that no wound in the Church cuts deeper than a shepherd who holds the office while living contrary to it, because people take their permission from what they see honored. This is why he insists that no one should dare to shepherd who has not first learned to be shepherded, and why the shepherd must love the flock more than the comforts of the office.

Pastoral Rule, Book I. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Ezekiel 34 is not anti-shepherd; it takes the office so seriously that failure in it is the gravest failure there is. Gregory, a pope, agreed.

St. John Paul II, d. 2005

In Pastores Dabo Vobis, whose very title is God's promise 'I will give you shepherds', St. John Paul II teaches that the priest is configured to Christ the Head and Shepherd of the Church, so that Christ's own pastoral charity, the total gift of self for the flock, becomes the inner form of the priest's whole life. The measure of every shepherd in the Church is the Shepherd who laid down his life.

Pastores Dabo Vobis (1992). Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* presses that ordained shepherds must be formed in the image of Christ the Good Shepherd. That is one part of the Church's answer to bad shepherding, alongside accountability, justice, and the protection of the vulnerable.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 754. Among the images of the Church: she is a sheepfold whose one necessary gate is Christ, a flock of which God himself foretold he would be the shepherd, whose sheep are guided by human shepherds yet ceaselessly led and nourished by Christ the Good Shepherd.

CCC 896. The Good Shepherd is to be the model and form of the bishop's pastoral office; conscious of his own weakness, the bishop is to have compassion and to spend himself for the flock.

CCC 553. Christ entrusted to Peter a specific authority in the Church, an office of shepherding confirmed after the

Resurrection when Jesus tells him to feed his sheep.

CCC 1465. In the sacrament of Penance the priest fulfills the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep; confession is Ezekiel 34:16 happening to one person at a time.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Whose right it is (develop). The crown left hanging in 21:27 finds a head tonight: 'my servant David', the one shepherd (34:23-24). Name the callback explicitly when Q5 lands; the group met this mystery in session 8 and should feel it click forward.

The everlasting covenant (develop). The 'covenant of peace' of 34:25 is the next installment of the promise planted at 16:60. Connect them in the Q8 debrief: the God who said 'yet I will remember my covenant' is now describing what keeping it looks like.

The heart of stone (develop). Quietly note in your Q8 answer that the chapter secures the flock but never says how the sheep themselves change. That unsolved question is next week's session. Do not preview chapter 36 by name to the group.

Son of man (develop). The address continues at 34:2, and Luke 19:10 puts 'Son of man' on Jesus' lips doing Ezekiel 34:16. Let the discovery groups notice the title themselves; do not point it out before they report.

Follow the glory (rest). Resting. Do not force it; it returns in strength in the final sessions.

Sealed guess (develop). The guesses open NEXT session. If anyone asks, smile and say soon. Tonight's covenant formula ('I am your God, you are my sheep') is whispering the answer; leave the whisper alone.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

If God judges between the fat sheep and the lean sheep, is he simply against the strong and successful?

Read verses 18 to 21 closely: the charge is not strength but the use of strength against the weak, trampling the pasture others must eat, muddying the water others must drink, shouldering the weak aside. Strength that serves the flock is what shepherding is. Strength that feeds on the flock is what gets judged.

The Church's history of failed shepherds proves the whole system is broken. Why stay?

Ezekiel 34 is the Bible agreeing with the anger and refusing the conclusion. God's response to corrupt shepherds is never to abandon the flock or dissolve the fold; it is to judge the shepherds and shepherd the flock himself, and then to give it shepherds after his own heart. Leaving the flock hands the sheep to the very scattering the chapter grieves.

Isn't 'my servant David' just nostalgia for a dead dynasty?

Ezekiel is under no illusions about the dynasty; chapters 17 and 21 dismantled it. Promising 'David' four centuries after his death, in a book that just abolished the monarchy, is deliberately impossible language. It forces the reader to look for a David who is more than David, which is exactly where the New Testament says to look.

Session Goals

1. Trace the indictment of verses 1 to 10 and identify who the shepherds of Israel are.
2. Count the first person promises of verses 11 to 16 and see that God assumes every failed duty personally.
3. Discover, from John 10, Matthew 25, and Luke 19, that Jesus deliberately takes God's shepherd role from Ezekiel 34 onto his own lips.
4. Hold the tension of verses 15 and 23, God himself and 'my servant David', and let the group articulate the incarnational resolution.
5. Face the steelman honestly: does this chapter abolish human shepherds, or promise better ones under the One Shepherd?
6. Develop the 'whose right it is' and everlasting covenant threads without opening the sealed guesses.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

Plan for 90 minutes: 10 for welcome and Win, 8 for the reading in three voices, 55 for Build (give the discovery groups a full 12 minutes and the steelman at least 10), 10 for Send and Live It, 5 for the closing prayer and memory verse. The chapter is one sustained argument, so the Build section moves faster than its question count suggests.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Psalm 23 Dig Deeper on question 3 first; point them to it as homework instead.
2. Then compress question 6 (sheep against sheep) into a two minute leader summary between questions 5 and 7.
3. Then run the discovery with two groups instead of three: assign John 10 and Luke 19, and read Matthew 25:31-33 aloud yourself in the debrief.
4. If truly pressed, take only one Win question.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you saw your flock scattered on the mountains with no one to look for them, and you did not send a substitute. You came yourself. Tonight, gather the scattered parts of us: the tired parts, the hurt parts, the parts still hiding. Give us ears to hear your voice in this chapter, and the honesty to admit where we are lost sheep, where we are fat sheep, and where you are asking us to tend someone else. We ask this through Christ our Lord, the Good Shepherd. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. Tell us about a boss, coach, teacher, or leader who genuinely looked out for you. What did they actually do that made the difference?

W2. When you hear the word 'shepherd', what picture comes to mind? Is it a soft picture or a tough one?

Both questions are seeding tonight's discovery that shepherding is gritty, responsible work, not a pastel painting. Do not explain that; just enjoy the answers.

Read

Read aloud

Read all of Ezekiel 34 aloud in three voices: reader one takes verses 1 to 10 (the indictment), reader two takes verses 11 to 16 (the takeover), reader three takes verses 17 to 31 (the judgment within the flock and the covenant of peace). Ask the group to listen for one thing: who does the shepherding in each section?

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The indictment, verses 1 to 10

1. Verses 2 to 4 read like a brutal job review. List everything these shepherds were supposed to do and did not do. And who do you think 'the shepherds of Israel' actually are?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The shepherds are Israel's leaders, above all the kings (shepherd was a standard royal title, and 2 Samuel 5:2 applies it to David directly), and by extension the princes, priests, and prophets. The failed duties pile up: they did not feed the sheep, strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strayed, or seek the lost, and what rule they did exercise was 'with force and harshness'. Meanwhile they fed themselves: eating the fat, wearing the wool, slaughtering the fatlings. Verses 5 to 6 give the result: the flock scattered over all the mountains with none to

search, which is exile described as a shepherding failure. The whole national catastrophe is laid at the leaders' door.

2. In verse 10 God says he is against the shepherds and will 'require my sheep at their hand'. Where have we heard that exact idea before in this study?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It is the watchman charge from chapters 3 and 33: the blood of the unwarned required at the watchman's hand. Sessions 3 and 9 established that Ezekiel is accountable for warning, not for results. Chapter 34 applies the same principle upward, to the entire leadership of Israel. Every shepherd is a watchman for the flock, and the sheep belong to God (MY sheep and MY flock, he keeps saying, again and again through the first ten verses). That possessive is the legal basis of the whole indictment: you cannot be fired from tending a flock that is yours; you can be fired from tending a flock that is his.

The takeover, verses 11 to 16

3. Go slowly through verses 11 to 16 and count the 'I will' statements. Then lay them side by side with the failures in verses 3 to 4. What is God doing?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. How many 'I will' statements can you find?

Ground. Match each 'I will' to a failure in verses 3 to 4. How complete is the match?

Depth. Why does God take the job himself rather than simply appointing better managers? What does that tell you about what shepherding is?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

There is a cascade of first person commitments: I will search, seek out, rescue, gather, bring, feed, make them lie down, seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the crippled, strengthen the weak, feed them in justice. Set against verses 3 to 4, it is point for point: every duty the shepherds abandoned, God personally assumes. He does not announce a reform program or a better hiring process. He takes the job himself, and then, in verses 23 to 24, promises his servant David as well; hold both. Verse 15 is the hinge of the chapter: 'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.' Notice too that the Hebrew verb for shepherding also means feeding, so 'I will shepherd them' and 'I will feed them' are the same promise; hold onto that.

Dig Deeper

Open Psalm 23 next to verses 11 to 16 and match them line by line: pasture, lying down, restoring, right paths, the dark valley, the table. Ezekiel 34 is Psalm 23 turned into a covenant promise for a whole nation.

Where this chapter goes

Live discovery

Split into three groups. Each group takes one passage, reads it aloud together, and answers two questions: how does

this passage pick up Ezekiel 34, and who is doing the shepherding? Give the groups ten to twelve minutes, then have each report.

Let them find it. John 10:11-16; Matthew 25:31-33; Luke 19:1-10

4. Ezekiel 34 does not stay in Ezekiel. Someone picks this chapter up, centuries later, and performs it. Let's find out who.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

All three groups should come back with the same astonishing finding: Jesus takes onto his own lips the role Ezekiel 34 reserves for God himself. In John 10 he says 'I am the good shepherd' and promises 'one flock, one shepherd', which is verse 23's exact promise. In Matthew 25 the Son of man sits in glory separating sheep, which is precisely what God says HE will do in 34:17. And Luke 19:10, 'the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost', is nearly a quotation of 34:16, spoken over Zacchaeus, a lost sheep of Israel found in a tree. Now press the point gently: Ezekiel 34 says the shepherd who does these things is God himself. So when Jesus claims the role, he is not comparing himself to a nice pastoral image. He is making a divine claim, and his first hearers, who knew this chapter, knew it.

One shepherd, my servant David, verses 23 to 24

5. By the time Ezekiel says this, David has been dead for nearly four hundred years. What is God promising here? And how does it fit with 'I myself will be the shepherd' just eight verses earlier?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God promises to set up 'one shepherd, my servant David', a prince (*nasi*) in their midst. Since David himself is long dead, this is messianic language: a coming son of David who is everything David was at his best, the shepherd king after God's own heart. But notice the group should feel the tension rather than have it dissolved too fast: verse 15 says God himself will shepherd; verse 23 says David will. The text leaves both standing. The oracle itself does not force the two together; the New Testament is where the fullest fulfilment appears, and the discovery passages just showed it: a Davidic shepherd who is God come in person. This is also the 'whose right it is' thread from session 8 clicking forward: the crown left suspended in 21:27, waiting for the one to whom it rightfully belongs, has just been given a name and a job description. He will be called David, and he will shepherd.

6. Look back at verses 17 to 22. God does not only judge shepherds; he judges 'between sheep and sheep'. What are the fat sheep doing wrong, and why does that matter for those of us who hold no office in anything?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The strong sheep eat the good pasture and trample the rest, drink the clear water and muddy what is left with their feet, and butt the weak with side and shoulder and horns until they are scattered. This is harm inside the flock, member against member, and it needs no title or office to commit. Nobody gets to read Ezekiel 34 as a chapter about clergy and sit back. The judgment is not against strength; it is against strength used to take from the weak. Every one of us is somebody's strong sheep: in a family, a friend group, a workplace, a parish. The question the verses put to us is what our strength costs the people downstream of it.

The obvious objection

7. Let me give you the strongest version of a reading many serious Christians hold, and I want us to answer it from the text, not from reflex.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Ezekiel 34 is God's verdict on the whole idea of human shepherds. He tried mediated leadership for centuries: kings, priests, prophets. It failed so completely that the flock ended up in Babylon. So God announces the end of the experiment: 'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.' Jesus fulfills that as the one Good Shepherd, and he says so: one flock, ONE shepherd. So when a church sets up a whole hierarchy of human shepherds again, pastors, bishops, a pope, and even calls them shepherds, it is rebuilding exactly the failed system this chapter demolishes. The lesson of Ezekiel 34 is: no more middlemen between the sheep and God.

Answering from the text. Feel the force of that; it takes the chapter seriously. But now read verses 23 and 24, inside the very same oracle: 'I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David... and my servant David shall be prince among them.' The chapter that says 'I myself will shepherd' also promises a shepherd God appoints. Mediated shepherding is not the failed experiment; it is part of the promise. What gets judged is not the office but its corruption. Then watch what the fulfilled Shepherd does: in John 21 the risen Jesus, the Good Shepherd himself, tells Peter three times to feed and tend his sheep, deliberately handing on the shepherd's work. And in 1 Peter 5:1-4, Peter charges the Church's elders to shepherd God's flock, not for shameful gain and not by domineering, which is Ezekiel 34's indictment turned into a job description, all of it under Christ 'the chief Shepherd' to whom every under-shepherd answers. So the New Testament keeps both of Ezekiel's promises: one Shepherd who owns the flock, and shepherds he sends who tend it in his name and are judged by his standard. The answer to bad shepherds was never no shepherds. It was, and is, the Shepherd himself, shepherding in person and through the men he configures to his own heart.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The chapter holds two promises together: God himself will shepherd (verse 15), and God will set up a shepherd, the new David (verse 23). The New Testament keeps both: Jesus is God shepherding in person, and Jesus commissions under-shepherds (John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:1-4) who tend HIS flock by HIS standard and under his judgment. Ezekiel 34 does not abolish the shepherd's office; it is the charter by which every shepherd in the Church is measured, and the reason failed ones face so severe a reckoning.

The covenant of peace, verses 25 to 31

8. What does life under the true Shepherd look like in verses 25 to 31? What older stories do these images echo?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God makes a 'covenant of peace': wild beasts banished, sleeping securely even in the wilderness, showers of blessing in season, trees and land yielding their fruit, the bars of the yoke broken. The echoes run deep: broken yoke bars recall the Exodus, and the fruitful, fearless landscape sounds like Eden restored. This is the everlasting covenant promised at 16:60 (session 6) taking on flesh and detail: the God who said 'yet I will remember my covenant' is now describing what keeping it looks like. And it all funnels into verse 31's covenant formula: you are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God. One honest observation to leave standing: the chapter secures the flock from every outside threat, but it never explains here how the sheep themselves, with their trampling and butting from verses 17 to 22, become different on the inside. Ezekiel has raised the new heart already (11:19; 18:31); chapter

36 is where he returns to it and gives it its fullest form. Watch this space.

9. Step back across the whole study. In session 4 the glory walked out of the temple, and God promised to be himself a sanctuary to the exiles. Tonight the kings fail, and God says 'I myself will shepherd them'. What pattern is this book showing us about how God responds when human structures fail?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He comes closer. That is the pattern. When the temple is defiled and lost, God does not build a backup temple; he becomes the sanctuary himself (11:16). When the monarchy rots and collapses, he does not draft a better dynasty from scratch; he becomes the shepherd himself, and promises a David in whom his own shepherding walks among the sheep. The failure of every mediating structure becomes the occasion for God to mediate himself. Followed to its end, this pattern has a name, and the discovery passages tonight showed us the face that goes with it. Let the group say it rather than saying it for them: the logic of Ezekiel is the logic of the Incarnation.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where in your life right now do you feel most like the scattered sheep of verse 6, and what would it actually mean to let yourself be searched for and found?

S2. Every one of us is a shepherd of something: a younger sibling, a friend group, a team, a small corner of a parish. Who has God put downstream of your strength, and what did tonight's chapter say to you about them?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Pray Psalm 23 slowly one evening this week with Ezekiel 34:11-16 open beside it, matching the promises line by line. Let 'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep' be said to you, not just about Israel.
2. Do one concrete act of shepherding for someone in your care this week: not a sentiment, an act. Feed, strengthen, check on, or go find one person, and decide who before you leave tonight.
3. If you have been hurt or angered by a shepherd of the Church, bring it to God in prayer this week using verse 10 honestly: he sees it, he names it, he judges it, and the sheep were always his. If you are able, consider bringing it to confession or to a trusted priest; the Catechism says the confessor's ministry IS the Good Shepherd seeking the lost sheep (CCC 1465).
4. Fat sheep check: name one place where your strength, your confidence, your seniority, your platform, costs somebody weaker. Do one thing this week to clear the water instead of muddying it.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 34:15

"I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD."

Ezekiel 34:15

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Good Shepherd, you searched for us when we were scattered, you carried us when we could not walk, and you fed us at your own cost. Judge whatever is a hireling in us, and make us shepherds after your heart for the people you have placed in our care. Strengthen the weak among us, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strayed, and seek the lost, starting with the lost places in each of us. We ask this in your name, Lord Jesus, the one Shepherd of the one flock. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 34** read in full, three voices

Discovery passages

- **John 10:11-16** group 1
- **Matthew 25:31-33** group 2
- **Luke 19:1-10** group 3

Steelman and support

- **John 21:15-17** feed my sheep
- **1 Peter 5:1-4** elders as under-shepherds, Christ the chief Shepherd

Background and callbacks

- **2 Samuel 5:2** David called to shepherd Israel
- **Psalms 23** Dig Deeper on Q3
- **Jeremiah 23:1-4** parallel indictment, leader background
- **Ezekiel 3:16-21; 33:1-9** watchman callback, Q2
- **Ezekiel 21:27** whose right it is, Q5 callback
- **Ezekiel 11:16** himself a sanctuary, Q9 callback
- **Ezekiel 16:60** everlasting covenant, Q8 callback

Terms

- ***ra'ah.*** Hebrew verb meaning both to shepherd and to feed or pasture; the chapter leans on the double sense
- ***nasi'.* * prince; the title given to the coming David in 34:24, where Ezekiel's preference for nasi' over melek* may signal a subordinated royal role

Catechism

- **CCC 754.** the Church as flock, God its foretold shepherd, Christ its gate and Good Shepherd
- **CCC 896.** the Good Shepherd as model and form of the bishop's office
- **CCC 553.** Peter's shepherding office, feed my sheep
- **CCC 1465.** the confessor fulfills the ministry of the Good Shepherd seeking the lost sheep

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 12. A New Heart

Reading: Ezekiel 36:16-38

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that God's answer to the whole problem of the book is not better behaviour but a transplant: clean water, a new heart, and his own Spirit placed within, and they open the sealed guesses against that promise.

Catholic Touchstone

Grace precedes and produces conversion: God gives what he commands, and the Church receives this promise concretely in baptism, confirmation, and ongoing conversion, where water and the Spirit act together as one divine gift.

This is the summit night. Everything the study has built converges here: the heart of stone planted in session 4, the impossible command of chapter 18, the 'for my name's sake' logic of chapter 20, and the sealed envelope from session 1. Ezekiel 36:16-38 explains why God restores (his own holy name) and how (not repair but replacement: water, heart, Spirit). Two things must land tonight. First, the grammar: God is the subject of nearly every verb, and Israel's obedience appears only after the Spirit is given. Second, the envelope: opened after the group has found verses 26-27, never before, so that the text answers the guesses rather than the guesses steering the text. Protect time for both. This session repays every week the group has invested; let them feel it.

What You Need to Know

Where we stand in the book

Since the hinge of chapter 33, Ezekiel's message has turned from demolition to rebuilding. Chapters 34 to 37 are the heart of the restoration oracles, and 36:16-38 is their engine room. The exiles hearing this have just absorbed the news that Jerusalem has fallen exactly as the dated word said it would. Every scaffold of national religion (land, temple, king) is gone. Into that emptiness God speaks a promise that asks nothing of them first.

The scandal of the name

Verses 16-21 name the wound the rescue must heal, and it is not primarily Israel's suffering. Wherever the exiles went, the nations drew the obvious conclusion: these are the LORD's people, and they had to leave his land, so their God must have failed. The exile has made God look beaten. The group met this logic in chapter 20 (session 8); tonight it becomes the foundation stone of the promises. Do not soften the double 'not for your sake' in verses 22 and 32; the whole chapter leans on it.

The grammar of grace

Walk verses 24-28 yourself before the session and count the first person verbs: I will take, gather, bring, sprinkle, cleanse, give, put, cause. Israel's only action, walking in the statutes, appears in verse 27 as the result of God's Spirit placed within. Set this against 18:31, where God commanded, get yourselves a new heart, and against 11:19, where he first whispered the promise. The command has become a gift. That

resolution of a tension the group has carried since session 7 is the night's central discovery; let them find the verbs themselves in question 3.

Water, Spirit, and the font

Ezekiel is a priest, and in verses 17-18 he reaches for a priest's categories of uncleanness; in verse 25 he reaches for a priest's remedy, sprinkled water (compare the purification water of Numbers 19). The Church proclaims this very passage at the Easter Vigil, the great night of baptisms, and has always heard 36:25-27 fulfilled in baptism and confirmation. Do not hand this to the group in advance; the discovery moment in question 5 lets them find the New Testament landing themselves, and the steelman in question 6 lets them test it.

A pastoral note on verse 31

The phrase 'loathe yourselves' can land hard in a mixed room, especially on anyone who struggles with shame or scrupulosity. The Hebrew idiom expresses profound contrition, not a command to self-hatred, and the order of the chapter is decisive: cleansing and the new heart come first, and remembering comes after, as the fruit of a heart that can finally feel. Contrition turns toward God; self-hatred turns inward and away. Question 7 handles this directly; give it room and do not rush anyone toward resolution.

Tonight's envelope

Bring the sealed envelope from session 1. Decide beforehand whether guesses will be read anonymously (recommended) or claimed by their writers. The ritual sits at question 8, after the group has discovered the transplant verses, so the text is already on the table when the guesses meet it. Resolve honestly: some guesses will hit the center tonight, and some are still waiting for their moment, because the book is not finished. Do not close any guess out.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Sinai surpassed

At Sinai the law was inscribed on tablets of stone, though even there the Torah asks for love and calls the word near, in the mouth and in the heart (Deuteronomy 6:5; 30:14). Here the inscribing itself moves inside, and God does it: a heart of flesh and the Spirit himself causing obedience. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is the twin oracle, promising a new covenant with the law written on hearts; Ezekiel supplies the how, God's own *ruach* placed within. Verse 28 seals it with the covenant formula the group met in chapter 16: you shall be my people, and I will be your God. Verse 28 carries the covenant formula; Ezekiel's everlasting covenant language itself comes at 16:60 and 37:26.

A priest's vocabulary

The sprinkling of verse 25 evokes the purification rites of Numbers 19, where water was sprinkled on the defiled so they could re-enter the camp and the sanctuary. Ezekiel the priest is saying: the whole people is defiled beyond any human rite, so God himself will perform the priestly cleansing no earthly priest could.

Back to Eden

Verse 35: the desolate land will become like the garden of Eden, and the nations will see it. This is not renovation but re-creation. The Bible's whole arc runs from a garden lost to a garden restored, with God dwelling among his people, and Ezekiel places this passage on that arc deliberately.

Fulfillment

The Church reads 36:25-27 as fulfilled in baptism (water and the Spirit as one birth), in confirmation (the Messiah's Spirit poured out on the whole messianic people, CCC 1287), and in the ongoing conversion of the baptized (CCC 1432). Jesus' night conversation with Nicodemus assumes that a teacher of Israel should already recognize this promise; the group finds that landing themselves in question 5, so keep it out of your framing until then.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Augustine of Hippo, d. 430

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

Confessions I.1.1.

For the group. The heart of stone is, among other things, a restless heart. Tonight God promises not to polish the stone but to replace it with a heart that can finally rest in him.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria, d. 373

St. Athanasius teaches, in substance, that God saves his people not because they have earned rescue but because it would be unworthy of his own goodness to let the work of his hands be ruined. God's faithfulness to his own goodness, and so to his own name, is on this account the surest ground of our hope, not the shakiest.

On the Incarnation. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone stung by 'not for your sake ... but for the sake of my holy name': Athanasius shows why that sentence is the best news in the chapter. A rescue anchored in God's own character cannot fail the way a rescue anchored in our performance would.

St. Ambrose of Milan, d. 397

St. Ambrose teaches, in substance, that the water of the font does nothing by itself: it is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit that makes the water cleanse and give new life, so the newly baptized should not see mere water but God at work.

On the Mysteries. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This is Ezekiel 36:25-27 in one breath: sprinkled water and indwelling Spirit as a single divine act. It is also what the Church means by a sacrament: not our ritual reaching up, but God's action reaching down through a sign he chose.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 715. The prophetic texts about the sending of the Spirit are promises spoken to the heart of God's people, promising a new heart and God's own Spirit placed within; the Catechism names Ezekiel among these oracles.

CCC 1287. The Messiah's fullness of the Spirit was never meant for him alone: it was to be poured out on the whole messianic people, as the prophets promised. This grounds confirmation.

CCC 1432. The human heart is heavy and hardened; God must give us a new heart. Conversion is first of all a work of God's grace, which makes our hearts return to him.

CCC 694. In baptism, water signifies the Holy Spirit's action: our birth into the divine life is given in the Holy Spirit,

and we are born of water and the Spirit.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

The heart of stone (resolve). Planted at 11:19 in session 4, sharpened by the command of 18:31 in session 7, developed ever since. Tonight it resolves: verse 26 turns the command into a gift. Name the resolution explicitly in question 4 so the group feels the payoff of eight weeks of tracking.

Sealed guess (resolve). Open the envelope at question 8, after verses 26-27 are on the table. Read every guess with respect. Tonight's answer is 'within you', but do not close out guesses naming the temple or the city; the book has three more movements, and some guesses may prove truer than they look tonight. Say exactly that.

The everlasting covenant (develop). Verse 28 repeats the covenant formula from chapter 16: you shall be my people, and I will be your God. One line connecting back to the foundling bride is enough.

The LORD is there (develop). Leader only: 'within you' is the penultimate answer to where God dwells, not the final one. The glory returns in chapter 43 and the city gets its name at 48:35. Reveal nothing; just keep the question alive by saying the book is not done answering it.

Follow the glory (develop). Lightly. God's vindication of his name before the nations (36:23, 36) is the pressure that will eventually bring the glory home. Do not say where or how; sessions 15 and 16 carry that discovery.

Son of man (rest). The address appears in verse 17 as usual; no development tonight. The transplant and the envelope need the air in the room.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Verse 27 says God will cause us to walk in his statutes. Doesn't that erase free will and make us puppets?

The Church rejects both errors here: Pelagianism (we do it ourselves) and determinism (God does it instead of us). Grace is not a rival to freedom; God moves the will from within as its Maker, the way a spring moves water, not the way a hand moves a puppet (CCC 1742). Sin gravely wounds and enslaves freedom; it does not abolish it. Grace heals that freedom, liberates it, and makes supernatural obedience possible. The Spirit's causing is what makes free obedience possible at all.

If baptism really gives the new heart, why do baptized people still sin, sometimes gravely?

Baptism truly regenerates, but it does not abolish the frailty of human nature or the inclination to sin that tradition calls concupiscence (CCC 1426). The transplant is real and the gift must still be lived, fed, and, when wounded, healed; that is why the Church pairs the font with the confessional and why conversion is the work of a lifetime (CCC 1432).

Session Goals

1. The group states in their own words, from verses 16-23, why God acts for the sake of his own name, and why that is good news rather than an insult.

2. The group counts the divine verbs of verses 24-28 and concludes for themselves that the new heart is gift before it is demand.
3. The group finds the New Testament landing of water and Spirit without being told where to look.
4. The sealed guesses from session 1 are opened, read with respect, and weighed honestly against verses 26-28, with unresolved guesses explicitly kept open.
5. Everyone leaves with one concrete way to live their baptism this week.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

In a 90 minute room: opening prayer and Win, 12 minutes; reading with pencil marks, 10; Build questions 1 to 7, about 40; the envelope (question 8), a protected 10; questions 9 and 10, 8; Send, Live It, memory verse and closing prayer, 10. In a 75 minute room apply the cuts below and guard the envelope's 10 minutes above everything except the transplant verses themselves.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut question 9 (Eden) first; fold its single point into your framing of question 10.
2. Cut both Dig Deeper boxes next.
3. If still tight, shorten question 2 to one exchange and let the St. Athanasius voice carry the 'for my name's sake' point on the Take-Home.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you see us as we are: hearts that have tried and failed, hearts that have grown tired, hearts that have gone hard in places we do not like to look. Tonight you speak a promise you have been preparing for this whole book. Send your Holy Spirit into this room as we open your word. Give us ears to hear what you want to give, and the honesty to admit we cannot give it to ourselves. We ask it through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. What is a habit you have tried to change by sheer willpower? How far did willpower get you?

W2. Tell us about something you, or someone you know, tried to fix over and over before finally admitting it needed to be replaced. How did you know?

Keep both light. The second one quietly plants the replace-not-repair image the whole night will pay off; do not explain that yet.

Read

Read aloud

Three readers: 36:16-21, 36:22-32, 36:33-38. Before reading, hand out pencils and ask everyone to put a small mark beside every 'I will' they hear. Read slowly; the marks matter later.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The wound God names

1. Before God announces any rescue, what problem does he name in verses 16-21? Whose reputation is at stake, and how did it get there?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Israel defiled the land and was scattered for it, but the deeper wound is in verse 20: wherever they went, they profaned God's holy name, because the nations drew the obvious conclusion. These are the people of the LORD, and they had to leave his land, so their God must have failed. The exile has made God look defeated. Whatever rescue comes must heal Israel and vindicate God's name before the watching world, both at once.

2. God says it twice, in verse 22 and again in verse 32: not for your sake. First reaction, honestly: does that sound cold? Now look again, remembering chapter 20. What does 'for my holy name's sake' actually secure?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It stings for a moment, and then it liberates. If the rescue rested on Israel's deserving, it would collapse the instant they failed again, and chapter 36 has just catalogued their failures. Because it rests on God's own name, it is exactly as unbreakable as God. We met this logic in chapter 20; tonight it stops being a pattern in Israel's history and becomes the foundation under the biggest promises in the book. The least flattering sentence in the chapter is the most secure thing in it.

Dig Deeper

The first petition of the Our Father, hallowed be thy name, is a prayer for verse 23 to come true in us: that God's name would be shown holy through his people before the nations. The Catechism's treatment of this petition (CCC 2807-2815) is worth an evening on its own; connecting it to Ezekiel 36 is our observation, but it is hard to unsee once seen.

The transplant

3. Now use your pencil marks. Walk through verses 24-28 and count: how many times is God the one acting? And what, precisely, is left for Israel to do, and when does their part appear?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Count the 'I will' statements out loud together and just let the total sit in the room.

Ground. Notice that verse 27 does not remove the statutes; it makes keeping them possible. God does not lower the standard, he changes the walker.

Depth. This is the biblical root of the Church's whole theology of grace: God's action does not replace ours, it creates ours. Question 4 will give it a name.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

I will take, I will gather, I will bring, I will sprinkle, I will cleanse, I will give, I will put, I will cause. Depending on how you count, eight or more first person actions, and Israel is the object of every one. Their walking in the statutes appears only in verse 27, after and because God's Spirit is placed within: and cause you to walk. The obedience this book has demanded since chapter 18 is finally given as a gift. Grace comes first and produces obedience; obedience does not come first and earn grace.

Dig Deeper

Jeremiah, Ezekiel's contemporary, received the twin oracle: a new covenant with the law written on hearts. Send an interested pair to Jeremiah 31:31-34 this week and ask them to report back on what Jeremiah promises that Ezekiel assumes, and what Ezekiel explains that Jeremiah leaves mysterious.

4. In 18:31 God commanded: get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Here in 36:26 he promises: a new heart I will give you. And back in 11:19 he first whispered this same promise. What has changed

between the command and the gift? And what is the difference between a heart of stone and a heart of flesh?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Nothing has changed in Israel; something is revealed in God. What he commands, he himself gives. St. Augustine turned this into a prayer: give what you command, and command what you will (Confessions X.29.40). Stone is dead, cold, unresponsive; you can strike it and it feels nothing. Flesh is alive, warm, woundable, able to be moved. God's answer to the whole problem of this book is not a demand to try harder but a transplant. And with that, the heart of stone we have tracked since chapter 11 finally resolves: the surgeon has announced the operation.

Live discovery

Group one: read John 3:1-8 and answer this: why is Jesus surprised that this particular listener does not understand being born of water and the Spirit? Group two: read Hebrews 10:22 and list the two things happening in that verse, one to the heart and one to the body. Then report back.

Let them find it. John 3:1-8; Hebrews 10:22

5. Somebody in Israel read these verses for centuries and waited for them to come true. Where does the New Testament pick up this exact promise of water and Spirit making a person new? Split into two groups and go find it.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Group one: Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a teacher of Israel, and many interpreters hear Ezekiel 36 behind his rebuke: water and Spirit together, making a person new from the inside. 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this?' Group two: Hebrews 10:22 pairs hearts sprinkled clean with bodies washed with pure water, inner reality and outward washing named in one breath. Ezekiel's sprinkling has an address in Christian life, and the Church has always read it as baptism. In fact this very passage of Ezekiel is appointed among the Old Testament readings of the Easter Vigil, the great night of baptisms.

6. Let's take the strongest version of the objection to what we just found, and take it seriously before we answer it.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Reading baptism into Ezekiel 36 gets the prophet exactly backwards. The sprinkled water in verse 25 is a metaphor for inner cleansing, precisely parallel to the new heart, and nobody thinks the new heart is a literal organ. The New Testament's weight falls on faith: Abraham was counted righteous before any rite, and Paul insists we are justified by faith apart from works. Baptism is the outward sign of an inward grace already received by faith; it testifies to the new birth, it does not cause it. Making a water ritual the instrument of regeneration risks repeating the very disease Ezekiel spent his whole book diagnosing: trusting the temple, the ritual, the whitewash, instead of the interior reality only God can give.

Answering from the text. Feel the weight of that; it is a serious reading, and its instinct is one Ezekiel shares: God is not impressed by rituals emptied of himself. But look at what the text actually joins. The sprinkling in verse 25 is not Israel's ritual reaching up to God; it is God's own action reaching down: I will sprinkle. It stands in a single unbroken chain of divine verbs with I will give you a new heart and I will put my Spirit within you. Ezekiel's cure

for empty ritual is not ritual removed but ritual filled with God. And that is exactly how Jesus lands it: to Nicodemus he does not say born of faith alone, he says born of water and the Spirit, one birth with two named elements, and Hebrews keeps them together, hearts sprinkled and bodies washed. Here is the deep logic: a sacrament in which God is the actor is the opposite of works righteousness. The infant at the font contributes nothing, which is Ezekiel 36 in miniature: I will sprinkle, I will give, I will put. And the Church agrees with the objection's best instinct more than it expects: baptism is not magic, it calls for faith and must be lived in ongoing conversion, or it becomes the whitewash of chapter 13. But the gift itself is God's act, not our testimony about ourselves.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The objection rightly refuses to trust empty ritual, and Ezekiel agrees. But verse 25's sprinkling is God's action, not ours, welded into one chain with the new heart and the Spirit. The New Testament keeps water and Spirit together in one birth, and hearts sprinkled with bodies washed. A sacrament where God is the actor is grace, not works: the strongest possible protection against the whitewash Ezekiel condemned. What baptism asks of us afterwards is faith and a lived conversion, which is where verse 27's walking comes in.

After the gift

7. Notice the order of the chapter: cleansing, new heart, and Spirit come first (25-27), and only then, in verse 31, you will remember your evil ways. Why that order? And what is verse 31 asking for, and what is it not asking for?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Real contrition is a fruit of mercy, not its price. A heart of stone feels nothing; only the new heart of flesh can look honestly at the past and grieve it, which is why the remembering comes after the transplant. The strong language of verse 31 is the idiom of deep contrition, not a command to self-hatred: God has just promised to cleanse, renew, and rebuild these very people, and verse 32's call to shame serves the humility that keeps the gift a gift. Contrition turns toward God and ends in love; self-hatred turns inward and ends in despair. The person who has been forgiven much remembers truthfully, and loves much. The Catechism says it plainly: conversion is first of all God's grace making our hearts return to him (CCC 1432).

The envelope

8. Eleven weeks ago, on the night Ezekiel saw the glory of God in Babylon, each of us wrote one sentence: by the end of this book, where do you think God will choose to dwell? Open the envelope now. Read each guess aloud, without names unless the writer wants to claim it, and list them where everyone can see. Then read verses 26-28 aloud one more time, and answer together: where has God just said he will dwell? Which guesses came closest tonight, and which might still be waiting for their moment?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Tonight the book gives its most intimate answer: within you. Not first in a rebuilt building, not on a mountain, but inside cleansed people carrying God's own Spirit, closer than the temple ever was. Guesses like 'in our hearts', 'in his people', 'with the exiles wherever they are' hit the center of tonight's text, and their writers should hear that. But be honest with the room: guesses that named the temple, or Jerusalem, or the land are not simply wrong, and no one's guess is closed out tonight. This book has three more movements, and some guesses may prove truer than they look

right now. Keep the list; we will finish weighing it on our last night together.

9. Look at verse 35. What single word there tells you the scale of what God intends, and why does it matter that the nations will see it (verse 36)?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Eden. Not repair, not renovation, but re-creation: the desolate land becomes like the garden where the story began. God's endgame has never been merely getting Israel back to normal; it is getting creation back to Eden, with God dwelling among his people. And the nations watching (verse 36) closes the loop opened in verse 20: the same watching world that concluded God had failed will watch him rebuild, and know that the LORD has spoken and done it.

10. For twenty chapters God refused to be consulted by his unrepentant people (remember 20:3: I will not be inquired of by you). What changes in verse 37, and what does it teach us about prayer?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The God who shut the door to inquiry now opens it: this also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them. Even the asking is part of the gift. Prayer does not inform God of anything or talk him into generosity; it is the way he has chosen to give what he has already promised, so that we are drawn inside the giving instead of standing outside it. And the last image (verse 38, a flock of men filling the ruined cities) quietly reaches back to chapter 34: the Shepherd who promised to gather his sheep is filling his fold.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where in your life have you been chiselling away at the stone, when what God is offering is a transplant?

S2. Most of us were baptized once, with water at a font, maybe before we can remember. What would change this week if you believed verse 27 was a present tense description of you?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. **Holy water, slowly.** Every time you enter a church this week, take the holy water deliberately, not on autopilot, and say to yourself: the cleansing Ezekiel promised is fulfilled here, in water and the Spirit. Let the sign preach to you.
2. **Go to Confession.** The Catechism says conversion is first of all God's grace giving a new heart (CCC 1432), and this is the sacrament where the transplant is tended for the rest of your life. If it has been a while, this is the week.
3. **Pray Psalm 51:10 each morning:** create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. One line, every day, before your feet hit the floor.
4. **Find your baptism date.** Ask a parent or your parish if you do not know it, and put it in your calendar as an annual feast. It is the day Baptism sacramentally applied to you the cleansing and the gift of the Spirit that Ezekiel

36:25-27 promises.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 36:26

"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

Ezekiel 36:26

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you promised through your prophet that you would sprinkle clean water on your people, give them a new heart, and put your own Spirit within them. You have kept that promise to us at the font, and you keep it still. Take out of us whatever has hardened. Give us hearts of flesh that can feel what you feel, grieve what wounds you, and love what you love. Cause us to walk in your ways, since we cannot walk them alone. And as we come near the end of this book, keep our eyes open for where your glory goes next. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 36:16-38**

Echoes within Ezekiel

- **Ezekiel 11:19** the promise first whispered, session 4
- **Ezekiel 18:31** the command that becomes tonight's gift, session 7
- **Ezekiel 20:3** inquiry refused, reversed at 36:37
- **Ezekiel 34:31** the flock of the Shepherd, echoed at 36:38

Old Testament roots

- **Numbers 19:17-19** priestly sprinkling for the defiled
- **Jeremiah 31:31-34** the twin oracle, Dig Deeper

Discovery passages

- **John 3:1-8** born of water and the Spirit
- **Hebrews 10:22** hearts sprinkled, bodies washed

Live It This Week

- **Psalm 51:10** daily prayer

Terms

- ****lev.**** heart: in Hebrew, the seat of thinking, willing, and deciding, not just feeling
- ****ruach.**** spirit, breath, wind: the one word carries all three, and Ezekiel trades on it

Catechism

- **CCC 715.** the prophets promise the Spirit and a new heart
- **CCC 1287.** the Spirit poured out on the whole messianic people
- **CCC 1432.** God must give the new heart; conversion is first his grace
- **CCC 694.** water as the sign of the Spirit's action in baptism

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 13. Can These Bones Live?

Reading: Ezekiel 37

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that God raises the hopelessly dead by his word and Spirit, reunites what human sin divided, and ends the chapter with his dwelling place set among his people forever.

Catholic Touchstone

The resurrection of the body and the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit: God's answer to death is not a metaphor but a promise, revealed in seed here and fulfilled in the risen Christ, and his final purpose is to dwell with his people.

Last week the group opened their sealed guesses against the promise of a new heart and a new Spirit. Tonight Ezekiel 37 shows what that Spirit does when he arrives: he raises the dead. The chapter has two halves that are really one work. In the valley of bones (verses 1 to 14), God re-creates a slaughtered people by word and breath, in two deliberate stages that echo the making of Adam. In the sign of the two sticks (verses 15 to 28), God takes a nation broken in half for centuries and joins it in his own hand under one shepherd-king, 'my servant David'. Then the chapter crests at the highest promise the book has made so far: a covenant of peace, an everlasting covenant, and God's own sanctuary and dwelling place set among his people for evermore. That sentence is the hinge into the last two sessions. The glory that walked out in chapter 10 is about to come home, and the wording of verse 27 will surface again on the very last page of the Bible. Read the room gently tonight: a chapter about hopeless dead things coming back to life will land hard on anyone grieving, and that is a grace, not a problem, if you leave space for it.

What You Need to Know

Where we are in the book

Jerusalem has fallen (session 9). The judgment oracles are finished, the nations have been answered (session 10), and God has begun the great sequence of restoration promises: the true Shepherd (chapter 34), the new heart and Spirit (chapter 36), and now chapter 37. The exiles' mood is captured by their own proverb in verse 11: 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.' The vision does not correct their assessment of the situation. The bones really are very dry. It corrects their assessment of God.

One word doing three jobs

The Hebrew word *ruach* means wind, breath, and spirit, and chapter 37 deliberately plays all three senses at once: the breath that enters the slain, the four winds it is summoned from, and the Spirit of God whom verse 14 finally names ('I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live'). English translations have to choose one word per verse; the Hebrew reader hears one word throughout. This is the same *ruach* that hovered over the waters in Genesis 1. Genesis 2:7 uses a different word, *neshamah*, for the breath of life breathed into Adam's nostrils; the creation echo is real, the lexical identity is not, so

do not claim it. Do not explain this in advance. The discovery moment at question 5 lets the group find the Genesis echo, and the Easter echo, themselves.

Two stages, on purpose

The bones are rebuilt in two distinct movements: first bone to bone, sinews, flesh, skin, and then, separately, breath. Verse 8 pauses on the eerie result of stage one: complete bodies, 'but there was no breath in them.' A reassembled corpse is still a corpse. Form without Spirit is not life. This is the book's whole argument in miniature: the return from exile, the rebuilt walls, even the restored worship will not be enough without the Spirit God promised in 36:27 and gives in 37:14.

What the vision means first, and what it grows into

God interprets his own vision in verses 11 to 14: the bones are 'the whole house of Israel', and the promise is national resurrection, out of the grave of exile and back to the land. That is the literal sense and you should say so plainly. But be honest about the direction the image points. An argument from resurrection only comforts if God can actually raise the dead, and Israel's hope of bodily resurrection matures precisely in and after the exile (Daniel 12:2; 2 Maccabees 7). The Fathers read this chapter as a witness to the resurrection of the flesh, and the New Testament's grave-opening language (Matthew 27:52-53; John 5:28-29) echoes verses 12 and 13. The Church affirms both: restoration first, resurrection in full flower. The steelman at question 7 works this seam.

- First meaning: Israel restored from the death of exile.
- Growing meaning: God's power and will to raise the dead, bodily.
- Full flower: the resurrection of Christ and of those who are his.

The two sticks and the old wound

After Solomon's death the kingdom split in two: Judah in the south under David's line, and the northern tribes (often called Ephraim or Joseph) under a succession of rival kings (1 Kings 12). The north was destroyed by Assyria in 722 BC, roughly a century and a half before Ezekiel, and its tribes scattered. By Ezekiel's day the division is older than living memory and looks as unfixable as the bones look dry. The sign of verses 15 to 23 answers it: two sticks, written with the two kingdoms' names, joined into one in God's hand. Resurrection and reunion are presented as a single work. The God who raises the dead also heals what sin divided, and both come under one king.

'My servant David' and the everlasting covenant

David has been dead for roughly four centuries when Ezekiel writes. The Church has read this promised Davidic ruler as the Messiah, the Son of David. This is the promised son of David, the figure the book has been circling since 'he comes whose right it is' in 21:27 (session 8) and the shepherd promises of chapter 34 (session 11). Under him God promises a 'covenant of peace' that is 'an everlasting covenant', picking up 16:60 (session 6), and then the summit: 'I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My dwelling place shall be with them.' The nations will know the LORD sanctifies Israel 'when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore' (verse 28). Everything in the last two sessions grows from these verses.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Creation replayed

The valley scene is Genesis re-run on a battlefield. In Genesis 2:7 God forms the man from dust and then breathes into his nostrils, and the man becomes a living being. Ezekiel 37 follows the same two beats:

formation first, breath second. The vision is telling Israel that their restoration will not be a repair job but a new creation, by the same Word and the same Breath that made the world.

Fulfillment in Christ and the Spirit

On Easter evening the risen Jesus breathes on the apostles and says 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20:22), the creator's gesture from Genesis 2:7 performed by the one who has just walked out of a grave. At Pentecost the Spirit arrives as a rushing wind filling a house of frightened, half-dead disciples who then stand up as a great host (Acts 2). And the chapter's closing promise, 'my dwelling place shall be with them', is taken up almost word for word at the end of Revelation, where the group will find it themselves tonight. Ezekiel 37 stands between the first breath of Genesis and the last page of the Bible, and it points both ways.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, d. c. 202

Writing against teachers who claimed the flesh was too lowly to be saved, Irenaeus argues that the God who formed man from dust at the beginning can certainly reform him from dust at the end. He appeals to Ezekiel's valley of bones as God's own picture of this: the flesh is not beneath God's power or outside his care, and the resurrection of the body is not an embarrassment to be spiritualized but the point. The same hands that shaped Adam will raise us.

Against Heresies, Book 5. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone who quietly suspects Christian hope is really about escaping the body rather than raising it.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, d. 386

Preparing candidates for baptism, Cyril teaches that the resurrection of the dead is an article of the Creed, not a pious extra, and he gathers Scripture's witnesses to it for people who found it hard to believe. His teaching, in substance: what looks to us like an absolute ending is, to God, raw material. The dead are not beyond his reach, because nothing that exists is beyond the one who made it from nothing.

Catechetical Lectures, Lecture 18. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For the grieving, and for anyone who says the Creed's last lines without ever having stopped on them.

St. Thomas Aquinas, d. 1274

Aquinas teaches, in substance, that the resurrection of the body exceeds every created power and belongs to God alone, and that our resurrection is not a free-floating hope but is caused by and patterned on the resurrection of Christ. Grace does not discard the body God made; it raises it. So Christian hope is not optimism about circumstances but confidence in a person who has already done, in his own flesh, what he promises to do in ours.

Summa contra Gentiles, Book IV. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For the young adult whose hope has been beaten down into vague positivity: this hope has a date, a tomb, and a body.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 703. The Word of God and his Breath are at the origin of the being and the life of every creature. Word and Spirit work together in creation, which is exactly the pairing the valley of bones replays.

CCC 715. The prophetic texts about the sending of the Spirit are oracles in which God speaks to the heart of his people, promising the Spirit who renews them within. That is chapter 37's outline: breath, reunion, dwelling.

CCC 992. God revealed the resurrection of the dead to his people progressively; hope in bodily resurrection grew from faith in the God who created the whole man, body and soul. This lets you honor the chapter's first meaning without cutting off where it grows.

CCC 820. Christ bestowed unity on his Church from the beginning, and the desire to recover full unity is his gift and our task. This grounds the application of the two sticks without pretending the chapter is directly about the Church.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

The LORD is there (develop). Verse 27, 'my dwelling place shall be with them', is the strongest development of this thread yet and points straight at the book's last line. Let the group feel its weight at question 10 but do not reveal the city's name; that is session 16's ending.

The everlasting covenant (develop). Verse 26 finally names it: a covenant of peace that is an everlasting covenant. Invite someone to recall 16:60 from session 6. The promise made to the foundling bride now has content: David's son, and God dwelling in the midst.

Whose right it is (develop). 'My servant David shall be king over them' (verse 24) picks up 21:27 and chapter 34. Do not close the thread; note that one shepherd-king now stands over a resurrected, reunited people.

Follow the glory (develop). The glory is not named tonight, but the promise of a sanctuary in their midst for evermore quietly sets the table for its return. If anyone asks where the glory went after chapter 11, smile and say next week.

Son of man (develop). God asks a mortal man whether mortals can live again, and it is the mortal man's preaching through which God does it. Worth one beat at question 2.

The heart of stone (rest). Resolved last week. If someone connects 37:14's indwelling Spirit to 36:26-27, affirm the link warmly; tonight shows what the new heart is for.

Follow the glory (note for you). One scheduling note rather than a thread: next week is the Gog oracle, chapters 38 and 39, which sits between tonight's promise of everlasting peace and the temple vision that follows. If anyone finishes chapter 37 tonight and reads on in dismay, tell them the placement is deliberate and that the question those chapters answer is exactly the one tonight's promise raises. Say nothing else about them.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Doesn't verse 11 settle it? God says the bones are 'the whole house of Israel', so applying this chapter to bodily resurrection, or to my own life, is taking it out of context.

Verse 11 gives the vision's first meaning, and we should say so without embarrassment. But notice what the image assumes: comparing exile to death and restoration to resurrection only comforts if resurrection is the kind of thing God can do. Scripture itself develops the seed: Daniel 12:2 speaks of those who sleep in the dust awaking, and the New Testament's grave-opening language echoes verses 12 and 13. The Church reads the fuller sense as growing out of the literal sense, not pasted over it.

Is this reincarnation, or just a resuscitation like Lazarus?

Neither. Reincarnation puts a soul into a different body; this vision insists on the same bones, the same people, remade. And the chapter's horizon is not a return to ordinary mortal life but an everlasting covenant and God dwelling with his people for evermore, which the Church reads as opening onto the resurrection of the body, fulfilled in Christ. Keep the two levels distinct: the oracle's own horizon is Israel restored in its land under the Davidic shepherd, and the fuller sense is the Church's reading of it.

Session Goals

1. Trace the two-stage re-creation in verses 1 to 10 and name why breath comes separately from form.
2. Discover the Genesis 2:7 and Easter-evening echoes of God's breath for themselves.
3. State the vision's first meaning honestly (Israel restored from exile) and weigh how it grows into the hope of bodily resurrection.
4. See resurrection and reunion as one work of God in the sign of the two sticks, under one shepherd-king.
5. Land on verses 26 to 28 and discover where the Bible's last book takes up 'my dwelling place shall be with them.'
6. Leave with a named 'dead thing' each person will pray Ezekiel 37 over this week.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

Prayer and Win, 10 minutes. Reading in three voices, 10 minutes. The valley (questions 1 to 7, including the discovery and the steelman), about 35 minutes; this is the heart, protect it. The two sticks and the covenant (questions 8 to 10, including the second discovery), about 20 minutes. Send, Live It, memory verse, closing prayer, 15 minutes.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper on 2 Maccabees 7 first.
2. Fold question 4 into question 5: read verses 7 and 8 aloud, name the missing breath in one sentence, and go straight to the discovery.
3. Compress the history in question 8's answer to a single line: the kingdom split after Solomon and never healed.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you made us from dust and you breathed life into us. Tonight you bring us to a valley full of everything we have given up on. Give us the honesty to name what is dead in us and around us, and the faith to hear your word spoken over it. Come, Holy Spirit: breathe on what we have buried. We ask this through Christ our Lord, who died and rose and will never die again. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. Tell us about something you had completely written off, a friendship, a hope, a team, a habit, that came back to life. What did that feel like?

W2. When you hear the phrase 'too far gone', what or who comes to mind first? You can answer as vaguely as you need to.

The second question can go deep fast. Receive whatever is shared, do not fix it, and carry it quietly into the study; the chapter will do the work.

Read

Read aloud

Three readers: verses 1 to 14 (the valley), verses 15 to 23 (the two sticks), verses 24 to 28 (the covenant and the dwelling). Ask the first reader to read slowly and not to rush the pause in verse 8.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The valley (37:1-3)

1. Before God says anything about the bones, he leads Ezekiel 'round about' them. What details does Ezekiel notice, and why do you think the vision makes him take inventory first?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He notices two things: there were very many, and they were very dry. These are not the recently fallen; this is a battlefield years after the battle, past mourning, past burial, past hope. God makes his prophet look honestly at the full extent of the death before a single word of promise is spoken. The vision refuses shortcuts: no resurrection hope is real that has not first counted the bones. That matters pastorally tonight too. God does not ask us to pretend things are less dead than they are.

2. God asks, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' What answers were available to Ezekiel, and what do you make of the one he gives: 'O Lord GOD, thou knowest'?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He could have said no, which is what every eye in the valley reports, or yes, which would have been presumption on his own authority. Instead he hands the question back to God: thou knowest. It is neither despair nor bravado; it is faith with its eyes open. Notice too who is being asked: 'son of man', the book's constant name for this mortal, breakable prophet. God asks a dying man whether the dead can live, and then, astonishingly, makes that man's preaching the instrument of the answer.

3. Look at verses 4 to 6. What exactly is Ezekiel commanded to do, and what is strange about it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He is commanded to preach to the bones: 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.' It is the most absurd congregation in Scripture. Bones cannot hear; that is rather the point. The power of this sermon is not in the audience's capacity to respond but entirely in the word being spoken. This is the watchman's whole career in one image: since chapter 3 Ezekiel has been told to speak whether they hear or refuse to hear, and now we see why. God's word does not depend on the liveliness of its hearers. It creates its own hearers.

4. Verses 7 and 8: what happens when Ezekiel prophesies, and what is still missing at the end of verse 8? Why might God do this in two stages?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

There is a noise and a rattling, bone to bone, then sinews, flesh, skin: complete bodies. 'But there was no breath in them.' Stage one produces a valley of intact corpses, which is arguably eerier than the bones. The two stages teach what the whole book has been arguing: structure without Spirit is not life. A nation can be reassembled, walls rebuilt, worship restored, and still be a corpse if the *ruach* of God is not in it. The same is true of a parish, and of a soul.

Live discovery

Split into two groups. Group one: find Genesis 2:7 and report what God does and in what order. Group two: find John 20:21-22 and report what the risen Jesus does on Easter evening and what he says. Then compare notes with Ezekiel 37:9-10.

Let them find it. Genesis 2:7; John 20:21-22

5. The word translated breath, wind, and Spirit in this chapter is one Hebrew word, *ruach*. Where have we seen God's breath do this before, and where will we see it again?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Genesis 2:7: God forms the man from dust first, then breathes into his nostrils the breath of life, and only then does he become a living being. Formation, then breath: exactly Ezekiel's two stages. The valley is creation replayed; restoration will be nothing less than new creation. John 20:22: the risen Jesus breathes on the apostles and says

'Receive the Holy Spirit', deliberately repeating the creator's gesture from Genesis, hours out of his own grave. Ezekiel 37 stands between those two breaths. And when the breath comes from the four winds, the slain stand on their feet 'an exceedingly great host', which is worth holding beside the rushing wind of Pentecost that turned a locked room of frightened disciples into the Church.

Dig Deeper

The hope of bodily resurrection ripens in Israel precisely during and after the exile. Read Daniel 12:2, and the mother and her seven sons in 2 Maccabees 7, and notice what she grounds her hope on: the God who made the world out of nothing can give life and breath back again. The valley of bones is the same logic in a vision.

6. In verses 11 to 14 God interprets his own vision. Who are the bones, what have they been saying, and what does God promise to do?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The bones are 'the whole house of Israel', and the proverb of the exiles is quoted back to them: 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.' The vision's first meaning is national: exile is a grave, and God will open the graves, put his Spirit within them, and set them on their own land. Notice that God does not dispute their diagnosis; the bones really are very dry. He disputes their conclusion. Hopelessness is accurate about the situation and wrong about God. Notice too that verse 14 delivers exactly what 36:27 promised last week: 'I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live.' The new heart was for this.

7. Here is a reading you will meet in commentaries and in honest conversation. Let's give it its full strength before we answer it.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. This chapter teaches nothing about bodily resurrection, and Christian use of it is anachronistic. God himself interprets the vision in verse 11: the bones are the house of Israel, and the promise is return from exile, full stop. Most scholars agree Israel at this date had little or no doctrine of individual resurrection; the vision borrows death as a metaphor precisely because everyone knew the dead do not rise. Reading the Creed, or baptism, or Easter back into it is eisegesis, and it dishonors the text's real meaning to its real audience.

Answering from the text. Start by conceding what is true: the first meaning is Israel's restoration, God says so, and any reading that skips that is careless. But press the metaphor's own logic. A comparison consoles only if the thing compared to is possible: telling hopeless exiles 'your situation is like death, and I will treat it like resurrection' is empty unless the God speaking can actually raise the dead, and the vision goes out of its way to show him doing it, bone and sinew and breath, not waving it away as mere imagery. Then watch the seed grow inside Scripture itself: Daniel 12:2, written in the exile's long shadow, speaks of those who sleep in the dust of the earth awaking; the Maccabean martyrs stake their lives on it; and the New Testament reaches for this chapter's own vocabulary, graves opened and the dead coming forth, when Christ dies and rises (Matthew 27:52-53; John 5:28-29). The Church does not read backwards; she reads forwards, from the literal sense the text plainly has to the fuller sense God was planting in it, and the Catechism is explicit that God revealed the resurrection to his people progressively. Ezekiel's audience received a true promise. We have watched it flower.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The objection is right that the vision's first meaning is national restoration, and we should always say so. It is wrong to lock the chapter there. The image only works if God can raise the dead; Israel's own later Scriptures develop exactly that hope out of the exile; and the New Testament treats grave-opening as the signature of the Messiah. First meaning honored, fuller meaning received: that is how the Church reads, literal sense first, fulfillment in Christ without erasing the original promise.

The two sticks (37:15-23)

8. Now the sign of the two sticks. What do the two sticks stand for, how old is the wound being healed, and where exactly are they joined?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

One stick is written for Judah, the southern kingdom under David's line; the other for Joseph, or Ephraim, the northern tribes. The kingdom split after Solomon's death and never healed; the north was destroyed by Assyria about a century and a half before Ezekiel and its tribes scattered. By now the division is older than anyone's memory, humanly as unfixable as the bones were dry. And notice where the sticks become one: 'in my hand', God says. Not by negotiation, not by one side absorbing the other, but in the hand of God. The chapter is insisting that resurrection and reunion are one work. The God who raises the dead is the same God who heals what sin divided, and he does not do one without intending the other.

9. Verses 24 and 25: 'My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd.' David has been dead for roughly four hundred years. Who is this, and where has this book been pointing at him before?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Not David back from the grave, but the promised son of David the book has been circling all along: the one 'whose right it is' from 21:27, and the shepherd God promised in chapter 34 when he said he would shepherd his flock himself and through 'my servant David.' Both promises now converge: one shepherd, one king, forever, over a people God has raised and reunited. The Church confesses that this figure has a name and a face: Jesus, son of David, who called himself the Good Shepherd and the resurrection and the life, and who gathers his one flock across every division we have ever built.

The dwelling (37:24-28)

Live discovery

Send them to the second-to-last chapter of the whole Bible and have them read Revelation 21:1-4 aloud, listening for Ezekiel 37:27.

Let them find it. Revelation 21:1-4

10. The chapter ends on the highest promise Ezekiel has made yet. Read verses 26 to 28 again slowly. Then let's find out how far this sentence travels.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Ezekiel 37:26-27: a covenant of peace that is an everlasting covenant, God's sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore, 'my dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' Revelation 21:3 takes it up almost word for word: 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them.' The last page of the Bible is quoting the promise we just read. This is where the everlasting covenant of 16:60 was heading, and it is one more clue in the question this study has been asking since session 1: where will God finally choose to dwell? Hold that. The glory that walked out of the temple in chapter 10 has unfinished business, and next week it moves.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where in your own life, or in someone you love, have you quietly concluded 'those bones are too dry'? What would it mean to answer the way Ezekiel did: 'O Lord GOD, thou knowest'?

S2. Ezekiel was told to preach to bones that could not hear him. Is there a place where God might be asking you to keep speaking or keep praying without any visible response? What makes that hard?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Name one 'dead thing': a relationship, a hope, a person's faith, a habit you have given up fighting. Once a day this week, pray Ezekiel 37 over it by name: read verses 4 to 6 slowly, put the dead thing where the bones are, and end with 'O Lord GOD, thou knowest.' Do not script the outcome; just keep showing up in the valley.
2. Each morning before you check your phone, pray three words: 'Come, Holy Spirit.' One breath in, one breath out. The chapter's whole promise fits in that prayer.
3. The two sticks: choose one divided relationship within your reach, a family rift, a cold friendship, a grudge, and take one small concrete step toward reunion this week: a message, an apology, an invitation. You are not required to fix it. You are required to put your stick in God's hand.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 37:27

"My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Ezekiel 37:27

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you asked your prophet whether dry bones can live, and you answered your own question with an army on its feet. Breathe on everything in us that has stopped breathing. Speak your word over what we have buried and given up on. Join what we have broken, in your hand, under your one Shepherd. And keep your promise, Lord: make your dwelling place with us, be our God, and make us your people. Come, Holy Spirit. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 37:1-14** The valley of dry bones
- **Ezekiel 37:15-23** The two sticks joined
- **Ezekiel 37:24-28** One shepherd, everlasting covenant, God's dwelling

Discovery passages

- **Genesis 2:7** Formation, then breath: the making of Adam
- **John 20:21-22** The risen Jesus breathes on the apostles
- **Revelation 21:1-4** The dwelling of God is with men

Leader support passages

- **Ezekiel 36:26-27** Last week's promise, delivered in 37:14
- **Ezekiel 21:27** He whose right it is (session 8)
- **Ezekiel 34:15, 23** I myself will shepherd; my servant David (session 11)
- **Ezekiel 16:60** The everlasting covenant first promised (session 6)
- **1 Kings 12** The kingdom splits after Solomon
- **Daniel 12:2** Those who sleep in the dust shall awake
- **2 Maccabees 7** Resurrection hope in the martyrs (Dig Deeper)
- **Matthew 27:52-53** Tombs opened at Christ's death
- **John 5:28-29** All in the tombs will hear his voice
- **Acts 2:1-4** The rushing wind of Pentecost

Terms

- ****ruach.**** one Hebrew word meaning wind, breath, and spirit; chapter 37 plays all three senses at once

Catechism

- **CCC 703.** Word and Breath together at the origin of every creature's life
- **CCC 715.** The Spirit promised: renewed hearts, a reunited people, God dwelling with them
- **CCC 992.** Resurrection revealed progressively to God's people
- **CCC 820.** Unity is Christ's gift to his Church and our task

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 14. The Enemy from the North

Reading: Ezekiel 38-39

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that the book stages one last assault after the resurrection oracle and before the temple vision, that God wins it without Israel fighting, and that the point of the whole scene is stated in the text itself: the nations will know, Israel will know, and God will never hide his face again.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church's final trial and God's final victory: the kingdom comes not by a triumph won inside history but by God's own act, and the Church follows her Lord through death into resurrection.

These are the two chapters most likely to have reached your group before you did, in the worst possible form. Gog and Magog have been mapped onto every empire in turn for two thousand years, and someone in the room has almost certainly seen a video identifying Rosh with Russia. Tonight you do three things. You read the oracle carefully enough that its own logic becomes visible: an enemy assembled from the four corners, brought by God himself, defeated without a battle. You put the crude modern reading and the serious critical reading side by side and answer them honestly. And you land where Ezekiel lands, at 39:29, which is one of the most beautiful verses in the book and the sentence that makes sense of everything in front of it. Place matters tonight. Ask the group why these chapters sit exactly where they sit, between the dry bones and the new temple. That question is the session.

What You Need to Know

Where these chapters sit, and why that is the key

Chapter 37 ended with resurrection, reunification, an everlasting covenant and God's sanctuary in the midst of his people for evermore. Chapters 40 to 48 will give the temple and the river. Between those two, Ezekiel puts an invasion. That placement is deliberate and it is the interpretive key: the oracle answers the question a restored people cannot help asking, which is whether the peace will hold. Ezekiel's answer is that it will, and not because Israel has become strong.

Who Gog is

Gog is called the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, of the land of Magog (38:2). Meshech and Tubal are real peoples of Anatolia, in what is now Turkey, and Magog appears in the table of nations at Genesis 10:2. The coalition in 38:5-6 gathers Persia to the east, Cush and Put to the south, Gomer and Beth-togarmah from the far north: the compass points of the known world. No such coalition and no such invasion is recorded in Israel's history. The names are real; the assembly is schematic, and that is a signal about how the oracle means to be read.

The 'chief prince' and the Rosh question

You will meet this, so be ready. The Hebrew phrase behind 'chief prince' is *nesi' rosh*, and *rosh* ordinarily means head or chief, which is how the RSV2CE and most translations render it. A minority

tradition treats *Rosh* as a proper name and then links it by sound to Russia, with Meshech read as Moscow and Tubal as Tobolsk. The sound-alike argument does not survive contact with the languages: Moscow and Tobolsk are named far too late and from unrelated roots. Say this plainly and kindly, once, and do not spend the night on it.

What God does and what Israel does

Track the verbs and the group will find the argument themselves. God puts hooks in Gog's jaws and brings him up (38:4). God brings him against the land so that the nations may know God through him (38:16). Then God fights: earthquake, every man's sword against his brother, pestilence, torrential rain, hailstones, fire and brimstone (38:19-22). Israel's army does not appear. The people who are attacked are described as dwelling securely in unwallled villages, without bars or gates (38:11), which is exactly the picture of the restored people in chapter 34. The oracle is not about Israel's strength. It is about God's.

The aftermath, and the sentence it is all driving toward

Chapter 39 gives seven years of weapons burned for fuel and seven months of burial in a valley renamed for the horde, along with a grim summons to the birds and beasts (39:17-20). The numbers are ritual and hyperbolic; the land is being cleansed, not surveyed. Then, at 39:21-29, Ezekiel states the point four times over: the nations shall see, the house of Israel shall know, God acted for the sake of his holy name, and finally, 'I will not hide my face any more from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel'. That last verse is the destination of the session.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The foe from the north

Jeremiah's early oracles warn again and again of evil breaking out from the north (Jeremiah 1:14-15; 4:6; 6:1, 22), and Ezekiel's own book opened with a storm wind coming out of the north (1:4), carrying not a threat but the throne of God. Tonight the north sends an enemy and God defeats it. If the group made anything of that storm in session 1, this is where the two ends of the book touch.

The nations assembled against the LORD

Psalm 2 pictures the nations raging and the kings of the earth setting themselves against the LORD and his anointed, and the answer is that the one enthroned in heaven laughs. Ezekiel 38 is Psalm 2 as a narrative. Joel 3:9-16 gathers the nations to a valley for judgment in similar terms. This is a shared Old Testament picture, not an isolated prediction.

The Spirit poured out

Ezekiel 39:29 ends the oracle with God pouring out his Spirit on the house of Israel. Joel 2:28-29 promises the same outpouring on all flesh, and Peter stands up at Pentecost and says that is what is happening (Acts 2:16-21). The group will make this connection themselves tonight. Do not name Joel or Acts before the discovery moment.

Fulfillment: Revelation's last assault

Revelation 20:7-10 takes Gog and Magog and uses them as the name for the final gathering of the nations against the camp of the saints, ended not by a battle but by fire from heaven. Notice what John changes: in Ezekiel, Gog is a prince and Magog his land; in Revelation the two together name the nations at the four corners of the earth. John is not predicting Ezekiel's invasion; he is using Ezekiel's scene as

the type of the last crisis. That move, from a named northern prince to a symbol of every hostile power, is the reading the Church has largely followed.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Augustine, d. 430

Augustine takes up Gog and Magog precisely to stop his readers pinning the names on a particular nation. They are not, he argues, some tribe on the edge of the map; the names stand for the nations of the whole earth in whom the devil is at work, and the assault they mount is the last, permitted, and brief.

The City of God, Book XX, chapter 11. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This is the answer to the person who has been shown a video identifying Gog with a modern country, and it is sixteen centuries old. The Church has been declining to make that identification for a very long time.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, d. c. 202

Irenaeus expects the Church's history to end not in a smooth ascent but in a final apostasy and a concentrated assault, permitted for a limited time, in which what has been resisted all along comes into the open. He is equally insistent that the outcome is never in doubt, because the victory belongs to Christ and not to the endurance of the saints considered on its own.

Against Heresies, Book V (chapters 25-30). Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Ezekiel says the same thing structurally: the attack is real, it is permitted, and it is over almost before it begins. If your group finds these chapters frightening, that structure is the consolation.

Bl. Julian of Norwich, d. c. 1416

He said not: Thou shalt not be tempested, thou shalt not be travailed, thou shalt not be afflicted; but He said: Thou shalt not be overcome.

Revelations of Divine Love (Long Text), chapter 68.

For the group. Read this one last, after the group has seen how the battle ends. Ezekiel does not promise the restored people that nothing will come at them; he promises that when it does, God fights and God wins.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 675. Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers, and the persecution accompanying her pilgrimage will unveil the mystery of iniquity in a religious deception offering an apparent solution to human problems at the price of apostasy from the truth.

CCC 677. The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, following her Lord in his death and resurrection; the kingdom will be fulfilled not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil.

CCC 676. The Antichrist's deception takes shape whenever the messianic hope is claimed to be realizable within history; the Church has rejected that falsification of the kingdom to come, including in the modified forms of secular messianism.

CCC 2853. The victory over the prince of this world is won once for all at the hour when Jesus freely gives himself up

to death; the accuser is cast down, and the Church prays to be delivered from the evil one in the confidence of that victory.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Follow the glory (develop). 39:21 says God will set his glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see his judgment. This is the first time in the book that the glory is described as displayed to the nations rather than to Israel. Make sure the group notices the audience has widened. Say nothing about where the glory physically goes next; sessions 15 and 16 depend on that arrival landing cold.

The LORD is there (develop). 39:29 is the strongest statement yet of the thread the whole study is walking toward: God will not hide his face any more. Let someone in the room say that verse aloud and let it sit. Do not connect it to the book's last sentence. The title of this study is still not to be explained; if a participant makes the connection themselves, nod and move on.

The everlasting covenant (develop). Chapter 37 promised an everlasting covenant and a sanctuary for evermore. Tonight tests it: what happens to an everlasting covenant when a coalition arrives? The answer is the session's discovery aim, and the group should conclude it rather than hear it.

Son of man (develop). 38:2 opens with 'Son of man, set your face toward Gog'. By now this is background music; point it out only if the group has stopped hearing it. Its payoff is still ahead.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

This is where the Bible starts naming modern countries. Rosh is Russia, Meshech is Moscow, Tubal is Tobolsk, and the whole chapter is a map of a coming war.

Leader only, and handle it gently if it surfaces, because the person raising it has usually been taught it by someone they trust. The Hebrew *rosh* here is almost certainly the ordinary word for head or chief, which is why the RSV2CE reads 'chief prince'. The sound-alike identifications fail on dates and on etymology: those cities are named centuries later and from unrelated roots. And Augustine was already telling readers not to pin these names on a particular nation in the fifth century. The serious point underneath the bad argument is worth honouring: the person wants the text to be about something real. It is. It is about every power that sets itself against God, which includes the ones on tonight's news.

God puts hooks in Gog's jaws and drags him into an attack, then destroys him for attacking. Is God not manufacturing the sin he punishes?

Leader only. This is the same question the study met at 14:9 and again at 20:25-26, and the same Catholic answer applies: Scripture regularly describes in the idiom of divine action what God permits as the ripening consequence of a will already set against him. Gog's hostility is Gog's. What the hooks image says is that the hostility does not escape God's governance, and that the moment of its unleashing is not chosen by the aggressor. Say plainly that the Church holds God to be in no way the cause of moral evil (CCC 311), and that the image is doing something else.

Session Goals

1. The group can say where these chapters sit in the book and why the placement matters.
2. The group concludes for themselves, from the verbs of chapters 38 and 39, that God fights this battle and Israel does not.
3. The group discovers the Pentecost connection at 39:29 on its own, and can say what it adds to the oracle.
4. The group can meet the modern geopolitical reading and the critical reading of these chapters and give an honest answer to each.
5. Every participant leaves able to say what the Church actually teaches about the final trial, in a sentence, without fear.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

For 75 minutes: opening prayer and Win, 10 minutes; the reading, which is long, 12 minutes on the survey plan below; Build questions 1 through 5, about 28 minutes, with the steelman at question 5 getting a full 10; the discovery at question 7 and questions 6 through 8, about 15 minutes; Send, Live It, memory verse and closing prayer, 10 minutes. For 90 minutes, give the steelman and question 9 the extra room.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper boxes first and point to them on the Take-Home.
2. Cut question 3 (the seven years and seven months) next; fold its one essential point, that the numbers are ritual rather than statistical, into your setup for question 6.
3. If still pressed, compress the reading further: read 38:1-16 and 39:21-29 aloud, and summarize the battle and its aftermath yourself in four sentences.
4. Never cut question 5 (the steelman), question 7 (the discovery), or question 9.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you are not nervous about anything. We come to you carrying the noise of a loud and frightening world, and some of us carry fear we do not admit out loud. Show us tonight what you are like when everything comes at once. Make us people who are not easily shaken, and who never confuse being safe with being strong. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. What is something you were badly frightened of as a kid that turned out to be nothing?

W2. Where do you go, or what do you do, when the news gets loud?

Keep this light and let everyone speak. The second question is doing quiet work: some of the room lives with a low-grade dread about the state of the world, and tonight's text speaks to exactly that. Do not name the connection yet.

Read

Read aloud

This is a long passage and it does not need to be read whole. Read 38:1-16 aloud, which gives Gog, the coalition and God's stated purpose. Then you as leader summarize 38:17 to 39:20 in three or four sentences: God fights with earthquake, confusion, pestilence, flooding rain, hailstones, fire and brimstone; the aftermath takes seven years of burning weapons and seven months of burial, and the birds are summoned to a grim feast. Then read 39:21-29 aloud, slowly, and stop. Ask the group to listen in that last section for how many times God says why he did all this.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

Where are we, and who is this? (38:1-9)

1. Before we look at Gog at all: what happened in the chapter we read last week, and what is coming in the chapters after this one? Given both, why might Ezekiel put an invasion right here?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. If the room is quiet: ask simply what chapter 37 promised, and whether an invasion fits comfortably next to it.

Ground. Ask what question a restored people would have that this oracle is answering.

Depth. Ask what it means that God answers the fear by staging the disaster rather than by denying that it could happen.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Last week: dry bones raised, two sticks made one, an everlasting covenant, and God's sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. Next: a temple, and a river, and a city. Between the promise of everlasting peace and the vision of the restored dwelling, Ezekiel puts an attack. The placement is the argument. A people who have just been promised peace for ever will ask, sooner or later, what happens the next time something comes; and every reader who has been given a promise by God has asked the same question at three in the morning. Ezekiel answers it before it is asked. Let the group reach this themselves; it is the whole session.

2. Look at the coalition in 38:1-6. Where do all these peoples come from geographically? And look at 38:4 and 38:16: who brings this army to Israel, and why?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Meshech, Tubal, Gomer and Beth-togarmah are northern, in what is now Turkey and the Caucasus; Persia is east; Cush and Put are south, in the region of Nubia and Libya. It is a list from the compass points, the known world assembled. And the one who brings them is God: 'I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws' (38:4), and 'I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me' (38:16). Two conclusions the group can draw. First, this enemy is schematic rather than a specific historical army; no such coalition ever marched. Second, the aggressor is not in charge of the timing. Whatever else is happening in this chapter, God is not reacting.

Dig Deeper

Genesis 10:2 lists Magog, Tubal and Meshech among the sons of Japheth in the table of nations. Ezekiel is reaching for the oldest map Israel had, which is another sign that the horizon here is the whole world rather than one border.

How the battle goes (38:17-39:20)

3. From the summary you just heard: what weapons does God use, and what does Israel's army do? Then look at 38:11 and describe the people being attacked.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God uses earthquake, the swords of Gog's own soldiers turned against each other, pestilence, torrential rain, hailstones, fire and brimstone. Israel does not fight. There is no muster, no battle line, no hero. And the people attacked are described in 38:11 as dwelling securely, in a land of unwalled villages, without bars or gates, which is precisely the picture of the restored flock in chapter 34: safe because of who guards them, not because of what they have built. If the group has been reading this study for three months, they should hear the echo. On the seven years of fuel and the seven months of burial: these are ritual numbers making a point about total cleansing, not a logistics report.

Dig Deeper

The summons to the birds in 39:17-20 is picked up almost word for word in Revelation 19:17-18, at the defeat of the beast. John knows these chapters extremely well, which will matter in a few minutes.

4. Read 38:17 again: 'Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel?' What is odd about that sentence, and what might it tell us about how this oracle wants to be read?

Take it as far as the room wants

Ground. Ask what difference it makes to read Gog as a type rather than as a specific general.

Depth. Press on the risk in both directions: what is lost if the chapter is only symbolic, and what is lost if it is only a forecast?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It is odd because no earlier prophet names Gog. What earlier prophets do describe, repeatedly, is an enemy from the north and the nations gathering against the LORD. So the verse identifies Gog not as a new prediction but as the figure the old warnings were always about: the archetype rather than a fresh headline. That is a signal from inside the text about its own genre. Ezekiel is not giving Israel a military forecast; he is giving the last enemy a name and a face so that it can be defeated in front of them.

5. Let us put the strongest case against this chapter on the table and take it seriously before we answer it.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Two versions, and the second is the serious one. The popular version says these chapters are a coded map of modern geopolitics, with Rosh as Russia and Meshech as Moscow. The serious version says almost the opposite: Ezekiel wrote a concrete oracle about a real northern invasion of the restored community, and it did not happen. No coalition of Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer and Beth-togarmah ever came up against Judah. On the ordinary standard the Bible itself sets for prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:22, if the thing does not come to pass, the word was not spoken by the LORD. Reading it 'spiritually' afterwards looks like the move interpreters make when a prediction fails, and Christians should be honest enough to say so.

Answering from the text. Deal with the popular version in thirty seconds: *rosh* is the ordinary Hebrew word for chief, the RSV2CE translates it that way, and Moscow and Tobolsk are named far too late and from unrelated roots for the sound-alike to work. Now take the serious version, which deserves better. Three answers, and the third matters most. First, the oracle itself resists being read as a military forecast: its enemy is assembled from every compass point rather than from one border, and 38:17 explicitly identifies Gog with what earlier prophets had already said, which points to a type rather than a bulletin. Second, genre. Ezekiel 38 and 39 sit at the point where prophecy shades into apocalyptic, using cosmic imagery for a final and decisive act rather than a datable campaign, and that is a form Israel used deliberately, not a hedge invented later. Third, and be honest here: the Christian reading of these chapters is not a face-saving reinterpretation invented after a failure. It is what the New Testament does with them. John takes Gog and Magog and makes them the name of the last assault of all the nations, defeated by fire from heaven, and he lifts the summons of the birds nearly word for word. Whatever one concludes about the reading, it is at least as old as the New Testament and is not a modern rescue. The honest position to model: the oracle's genre is genuinely debated, the Church has defined nothing about its details, and what the Church does teach about the end is not a timetable but a shape, a final trial and God's victory.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The move to walk the group through is the one about genre, and the discipline to model is refusing both cheap

options. Do not defend the chapter by turning it into tomorrow's news, and do not save it by emptying it of any claim. Ezekiel is telling a restored people something true and terrible and comforting: an enemy will come, and it will be the last one, and it will not be a contest.

Why God does it (39:21-29)

6. In that last section, God gives his reasons. Find every statement of purpose you can. Who is supposed to learn what?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The purposes stack up: the nations shall see God's judgment and his hand laid on them (39:21); the house of Israel shall know that he is the LORD their God from that day forward (39:22); the nations shall know that Israel went into exile for their own iniquity and not because God was weak (39:23-24); and God acts for the sake of his holy name (39:25). This is the same logic the group met in session 8, the name that will not be profaned, and it is worth naming the pattern out loud. Then comes the turn that changes the tone of the whole oracle.

Dig Deeper

Compare 36:22-23, where God says explicitly that he acts not for Israel's sake but for the sake of his holy name. The Gog oracle is that principle applied to the last enemy.

Live discovery

Split into two teams and give them four minutes. Team 1: read Joel 2:28-29 and write down what God promises to do and to whom. Team 2: read Acts 2:14-21 and write down what Peter says is happening and what he quotes to explain it. Then have both teams report before you say anything, and only then read Ezekiel 39:29 aloud again.

Let them find it. Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:14-21

7. Now look hard at the very last verse of the oracle, 39:29. After the coalition, the hailstones, the seven months of burial, what is the last thing God says he will do? And what did your teams just find?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The last word of the whole Gog oracle is not a battlefield. It is: 'and I will not hide my face any more from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD.' Team 1 finds Joel promising to pour out the Spirit on all flesh, sons and daughters, old and young, menservants and maidservants. Team 2 finds Peter standing up in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and saying that this is that. Put the three together and the group has the whole trajectory: the oracle that ends with the last enemy destroyed ends, in the same breath, with the Spirit poured out and God's face no longer hidden, and the New Testament says the pouring out has begun. The hiding of the face is Israel's word for exile and abandonment, and it is being retired here permanently. If your group has been tracking where God dwells since session 1, this verse is a floodlight. Let it sit. Do not connect it to the book's last sentence; that is two sessions away.

Dig Deeper

Deuteronomy 31:17-18 and Psalm 13:1 show what the hidden face means in Israel's vocabulary: judgment, absence, the silence that makes people ask where God has gone. 39:29 is the answer to every one of those verses.

8. The Catechism says the Church will pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many, and that the kingdom will come not by a historical triumph of the Church but by God's victory over the last unleashing of evil (CCC 675, 677). How does that compare with what we just read in Ezekiel? What is the same, and what does the Catechism add?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The shape is the same, and the group should be able to say so: a real assault, permitted, and a victory that belongs to God rather than to the strength of the people attacked. What the Catechism adds is Christological. The Church enters glory only through this final Passover, following her Lord in his death and resurrection, which means the pattern is not merely a rescue from outside but a share in what Christ has already done. That is worth saying to a room that has been handed a lot of end-times anxiety: the Church's expectation is not a prediction about which country does what, but a shape, a trial and a victory, and both of them are Christ's before they are ours.

Dig Deeper

CCC 676 is the paragraph that names the deception directly: the claim that the messianic hope can be realized within history, including in secularized forms. It cuts against apocalyptic date-setting and against political utopias in the same sentence.

Bringing it home

9. The people in this oracle are described as living in unwalled villages, without bars or gates, and they are attacked anyway, and they are fine. What would it look like to live that way? And what is the difference between that and being naive?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

There is no wrong answer here; let them work. The distinction worth landing is that the unwalled village in 38:11 is not careless, it is defended by someone else. The people are not told the attack will not come. They are told who fights it. Naivety denies the danger; faith names the danger and locates the defence somewhere other than in itself. Someone in the room is carrying real fear about the state of the world, and this is the verse for them: not a promise of no storms, but of not being overcome. Julian of Norwich's line is the right one to close on if you have not used it yet.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. What are you fortifying right now that God has not asked you to fortify?

S2. If you really believed God would not hide his face from you again, what is one thing you would stop bracing against this week?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Once this week, when the news gets loud, stop and read Ezekiel 39:29 slowly instead of scrolling further. Let the last sentence of the oracle be the last thing you read on the subject that day.
2. Name one wall you have built that was meant to be God's job. Say it out loud in prayer and ask, once, to be able to live without it.
3. Pray for one nation currently in the news by name, every day this week. Gog is every hostile power, and the oracle ends with the nations knowing God rather than being annihilated.
4. Memorize this week's verse and say it whenever you catch yourself doom-scrolling.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 39:29

"And I will not hide my face any more from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD."

Ezekiel 39:29

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you laughed at the raging of the nations before we were born and you will laugh at it after we are gone. Thank you that our safety was never our own work. Take from us the fear that makes us build walls you never asked for, and the false calm that pretends nothing is coming. Pour out your Spirit on us. And do not hide your face. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 38:1-16** read aloud: Gog, the coalition, God's stated purpose
- **Ezekiel 38:17-39:20** leader summarizes in three or four sentences; do not read whole
- **Ezekiel 39:21-29** read aloud slowly; the destination of the session

Discovery passages, do not read aloud before question 7

- **Joel 2:28-29** Team 1: the Spirit poured out on all flesh
- **Acts 2:14-21** Team 2: Peter says this is that

Supporting texts in Build answers

- **Genesis 10:2** Magog, Tubal and Meshech in the table of nations (Dig Deeper, question 2)
- **Ezekiel 34:25-28** the flock dwelling securely; the echo behind 38:11
- **Ezekiel 36:22-23** for the sake of my holy name (Dig Deeper, question 6)
- **Jeremiah 1:14-15; 6:22** leader prep: evil out of the north
- **Psalms 2:1-6** leader prep: the nations rage, the LORD laughs
- **Deuteronomy 31:17-18; Psalm 13:1** the hidden face (Dig Deeper, question 7)
- **Revelation 19:17-18** the birds summoned (Dig Deeper, question 3)
- **Revelation 20:7-10** leader prep: Gog and Magog as the last assault; do not hand over early
- **Deuteronomy 18:22** the test the steelman appeals to

Terms

- **Gog.** the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal; a named figure who functions in the oracle as the archetype of hostile power
- **Magog.** Gog's land, listed among the sons of Japheth in Genesis 10:2; in Revelation the two names together stand for the nations of the earth
- **rosh.** head, chief; the RSV2CE renders the phrase 'chief prince', and the reading of Rosh as a proper name is not supported

Catechism

- **CCC 675.** the Church's final trial and the religious deception that accompanies it
- **CCC 676.** the messianic hope cannot be realized within history
- **CCC 677.** the Church enters glory through a final Passover; the kingdom comes by God's victory
- **CCC 2853.** the victory over the prince of this world is won at the hour of Christ's self-offering
- **CCC 311.** God is in no way the cause of moral evil (Objection Bench)

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 15. The Glory Comes Home

Reading: Ezekiel 40:1-4; 43:1-12; 44:1-3 (with the temple vision surveyed)

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that the glory that walked out of the temple in chapters 10 and 11 returns by the very same east gate, and they weigh for themselves what this measured, visionary temple is actually pointing to.

Catholic Touchstone

Christ is the true temple, the definitive dwelling of God among men; the Church, the soul in grace, and the heavenly Jerusalem are where his glory now takes up residence, which is why the tabernacle lamp burns and why the Fathers saw even Mary in the sealed east gate.

This is the emotional payoff of the whole study, and it arrives directly after the Gog oracle: last week the last enemy was destroyed and God promised never to hide his face again, and tonight the group finds out what that looks like architecturally. In session 4 your group watched the glory leave the temple in slow, reluctant stages, pausing at the east gate, standing on the mountain east of the city. Tonight, fourteen years after Jerusalem's fall, Ezekiel is carried in vision to a very high mountain and shown a temple measured gate by gate, and then the glory comes back from the east, by the same gate it left through, and fills the house. The Follow the glory thread, planted in session 1, resolves tonight. Let the group find the reversal themselves; do not announce it. Then help them do the harder, more interesting work: this temple was never built, so what is it? Hold the question open long enough for them to feel it before the New Testament answers it.

What You Need to Know

A dated hope

Ezekiel 40:1 stamps the vision with a date: the twenty-fifth year of the exile, fourteen years after the city fell, usually reckoned to around 573 BC. Every dated oracle so far has been a countdown to catastrophe. This one is different. Ezekiel is taken "in the visions of God" to a very high mountain in the land of Israel and meets a man whose appearance is like bronze, holding a measuring reed. The genre marker matters: the text itself calls this a vision, not a construction contract. The prophet's commission in 40:4 is to look, to hear, to set his mind on everything shown him, and to declare it to the house of Israel.

Your two-minute flyover of chapters 40 to 42

You will not read chapters 40 to 42 aloud; you will survey them. Rehearse a brief guided flyover in your own words, roughly along these lines: a wall around the whole complex; a great east gate, mirrored by identical north and south gates; an outer court, then an inner court higher up, entered by matching gates; chambers for priests; the temple building itself at the top and center; everything measured with the reed, threshold by threshold, in careful symmetry, with holiness increasing as you move inward and upward. Two facts to hold ready but not to hand over early: nowhere in the vision is anyone

commanded to build this, and when the exiles returned under Zerubbabel they did not build it. No temple we know of, the postexilic or the Herodian included, was built to this plan.

- Keep the flyover to two minutes; its job is to make the group feel the exactness, not to memorize the floor plan.
- If someone asks about the sacrifices described later in the vision, the objection bench below has your answer.

The return of the glory (leader only; the group discovers this)

Ezekiel 43:1-5 is a deliberate, step-by-step reversal of the departure your group traced in session 4. In 10:18-19 the glory left the threshold and paused at the east gate of the house; in 11:22-23 it went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain east of the city. Now Ezekiel is brought to the gate facing east, and the glory of the God of Israel comes from the east, enters by the east gate, and fills the temple. Ezekiel himself makes the identification for us in 43:3: this is the same vision he saw by the river Chebar in chapter 1, and the same he saw when the city was destroyed. Same glory, same seer, same gate, opposite direction. Do not preach this. Send them to the texts and let them find it.

The shut gate and the prince

In 44:1-3 the east gate is shut, permanently, for one stated reason: the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered by it. God's door is not reused. One figure, the prince (Hebrew *nasi*), is permitted to sit in the gate's vestibule and eat bread before the LORD. Ezekiel never calls him king; he has often been connected with the Davidic figure the study has been tracking since 21:27 (the one whose right it is) and 34:23-24 (my servant David). Christian tradition also drew a second, tender reading from the sealed gate: St. Ambrose and the later Latin tradition saw in the gate through which the Lord alone passed, and which remained shut, a figure of Mary's perpetual virginity. Present that reading honestly for what it is: a venerable spiritual reading cherished by the liturgy, not the literal sense of the verse, and not the ground of the doctrine, which the Church holds on other grounds (CCC 499).

How the Church reads this temple

The Church has never issued a definitive verse-by-verse interpretation of Ezekiel 40 to 48, so hold the latitude honestly. What is fixed for a Catholic reader: the sacrifices of the old law are not coming back, because Christ's one sacrifice is complete (Hebrews 10), and Christ himself is the true temple (John 2:19-21; CCC 586, 1197). Within that frame, the tradition reads the vision along the senses of Scripture (CCC 117): literally, a real vision given to real exiles as a certified promise that God will dwell with his people again; and spiritually, fulfilled in ascending landings: the body of Christ, the Church built of living stones, the baptized soul in grace, and finally the heavenly Jerusalem, where John sees no temple at all because the Lord God and the Lamb are its temple. The measured exactness is not wasted in this reading; it means the promise is definite, not a mood.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The third filling

Twice before in Israel's story the glory has filled a newly prepared dwelling: the tabernacle at Sinai (Exodus 40:34-35) and Solomon's temple at its dedication (1 Kings 8:10-11). Ezekiel 43:5, where the glory of the LORD fills the temple, strongly echoes both and is often read as the third scene in that series. Anyone with the passages open can verify the echo, which makes it your strongest card: the vision is announcing a new Sinai moment, a new dedication, God moving back in.

The mountain east of the city

In 11:23 the departing glory stood on the mountain east of the city, traditionally identified with the Mount of Olives. Luke shows Jesus coming down that descent toward the city and then into the temple (Luke 19:37-45); the correspondence is suggestive, and Luke does not say he entered from the east. The tradition has long savored the correspondence. Offer it as suggestive rather than as proof; the geography is certain, the theological intention of the evangelists at this point is an inference.

The Word pitched his tent

John 1:14 says the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and the Greek verb is *eskenosen*, literally that he pitched his tent, he tabernacled among us, "and we have beheld his glory." John 2:19-21 completes the thought: Jesus speaks of the temple of his body. The glory that came back through the east gate of Ezekiel's vision came back, in the fullness of time, in flesh. From there the fulfillment cascades outward: the Church as God's building of living stones (1 Peter 2:4-5), the Christian as temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19, which lands directly on session 12's promise of the Spirit within), the Eucharistic presence, and at last the city where no temple stands because God himself is its temple (Revelation 21:22).

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Gregory the Great, d. 604

Gregory preached a whole series of homilies on these very chapters while Rome itself was under threat from Lombard armies, and he eventually broke the series off because of the siege. In substance he teaches that Ezekiel's measured temple is the Church and the faithful soul: the gates, walls, steps, and chambers signify the life of grace, and the measuring itself teaches that God builds his dwelling in us deliberately, virtue by virtue, nothing left approximate. A man watching his own city fail preached that God's true building was still going up.

Homilies on Ezekiel, Book 2. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For young adults living in what can feel like a collapsing culture, Gregory is the proof that this session's reading is not escapism; it was forged under siege.

St. Ambrose, d. 397

Ambrose, in substance, reads the east gate of Ezekiel 44 as a figure of Mary: the gate that faces the sunrise, through which the Lord alone passed into the world, and which remains sealed. What the vision honors in architecture, the sealed door of God's own entrance, Ambrose sees honored in a person, the Virgin whose womb was the Lord's one gate into human history and remained wholly his.

De institutione virginis (On the Instruction of a Virgin). Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This shows the group how the Church's spiritual reading of the Old Testament works at its most tender: not forcing the text, but recognizing a pattern God loves to repeat.

St. Cyril of Alexandria, d. 444

Cyril teaches in his commentary on John that in the Word made flesh the glory of God has taken up its dwelling among men and the Lord's own body is the true temple. What the ancient sanctuary held in shadow and figure, the Incarnation holds in truth; and because the Word has made our nature his temple, he makes us in turn, through his Spirit, temples of the living God.

Commentary on John, locus not pinned. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Cyril closes tonight's loop: the group will find the returning glory in Ezekiel, then find in John where it finally landed. Cyril says out loud what they will have pieced together.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 586. Far from being hostile to the temple, Jesus identified himself with it, presenting himself as God's definitive dwelling place among men; his body, destroyed and raised, is the true temple.

CCC 1197. Christ is the true temple of God, the place where his glory dwells; by grace Christians also become temples of the Holy Spirit, living stones from which the Church is built.

CCC 756. The Church is God's building: the holy temple built of living stones, the dwelling place of God among men, the holy city and new Jerusalem.

CCC 117. Beyond the literal sense, Scripture carries a spiritual sense, divided into allegorical, moral, and anagogical; this is the frame for reading Ezekiel's temple as pointing to Christ, the life of grace, and heaven.

CCC 499. The Church confesses Mary's real and perpetual virginity; she is celebrated as ever-virgin. Cited here for the doctrine itself, which does not rest on Ezekiel 44; the gate image is the tradition's poetry about a truth held on other grounds.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Follow the glory (resolve). Planted at the Chebar in session 1, walked out in session 4, tonight it comes home by the same east gate. After question 3's discovery lands, name the arc out loud: we have been following the glory for fifteen weeks, and tonight it came back. Let the room feel the door close on that thread.

The LORD is there (develop). 43:7, God will dwell in the midst of his people for ever, is one step from the book's final sentence. Point at the permanence; do NOT reveal the city's name. Next week resolves this.

Son of man (develop). God addresses Ezekiel as son of man at 43:7, showing the seer a homecoming his own generation will never build. The one who ate the scroll of lamentation now swallows a floor plan of hope.

Whose right it is (develop). The prince at the shut gate (44:3) quietly joins 21:27 and 34:23-24. Connect the dots lightly and hedge honestly; do not overclaim a one-to-one identification.

The everlasting covenant (develop). The 'for ever' of 43:7 and 43:9 picks up last week's ending, the sanctuary in their midst for evermore (37:26-28). Same promise, now given an address.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Chapters 43 to 46 of this same vision prescribe sin offerings and a functioning altar. Whatever reading you take, doesn't that contradict Hebrews?

The vision speaks the only sacrificial vocabulary Israel had; within its idiom, restored communion with God is described as restored worship. The Christian reading holds that the reality signified is the one perfect sacrifice of Christ, which the old offerings always foreshadowed. Notice that anyone who presses the sacrifices literally has the same problem in reverse and sharper: Hebrews 10 rules out any return of atoning animal sacrifice, full stop.

Isn't the Marian reading of the shut gate just pious imagination pasted onto the text?

Distinguish the senses. The literal sense is stated in the verse: the gate is sealed in honor because the LORD entered by it. The spiritual reading, Ambrose's and the liturgy's, discerns the same divine pattern in Mary. The doctrine of the perpetual virginity does not depend on this verse and the Church has never claimed it does; the image is a treasure of the tradition, not a proof text. Presented that way, it is both honest and beautiful.

If this temple was never built, wasn't the prophecy simply false?

The text calls itself "visions of God" (40:2) and never commands construction. Its own details push past architecture: a very high mountain that matches no geography, holiness spreading over the whole mountaintop. A promise can be kept in a greater key than it was given. Jesus keeping the temple promise in his own body is fulfillment, not failure.

Session Goals

1. The group discovers the east-gate reversal themselves, by putting chapters 10 and 11 side by side with 43, and the Follow the glory thread resolves.
2. They weigh the literal-future-temple reading at full strength and answer it from the text and the New Testament.
3. They connect the returned glory to the Incarnation, the Church, the Eucharist, and their own baptized bodies.
4. They meet the shut gate and the prince, including the Marian tradition, with honest labels on what is literal sense, what is spiritual reading, and what is defined doctrine.
5. They leave with the 'for ever' of 43:7 ringing, ready for the book's last word next week.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

For 90 minutes: Win 10; reading plus the two-minute flyover 15; questions 1 and 2, 10; the gate discovery and debrief 12; questions 4 to 6, 15; the John discovery and the steelman 15; questions 9 and 10, 8; Send, Live It, and closing prayer 5.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper boxes first.
2. Fold question 4 into the debrief of question 3; one sentence from you covers it.
3. Trim the chapters 40 to 42 flyover to two sentences: a measured temple, courts rising toward the center.
4. If still short, deliver question 10's synthesis yourself as a sixty-second summary instead of a discussion.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Lord God of Israel, you have never abandoned your people, even when your glory seemed to walk away. You measure what you mean to build, and you finish what you measure. Tonight, turn our faces to the east. Come back through every door we have watched you leave by; fill this room, and fill us, as you once filled the temple. We ask this through Christ our Lord, in whom your glory came home for good. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. Tell us about a time you went back to a place that used to matter to you: a childhood home, an old school, a church. What did walking back in feel like?

W2. When something in your life breaks badly, are you a 'repair the original' person or a 'replace it with something better' person? Why?

Both questions are seeding tonight's tension: does God repair the old temple or build something greater? Do not resolve it; just enjoy the answers.

Read

Read aloud

Two readers for Ezekiel 40:1-4. Then you give a two-minute guided flyover of chapters 40 to 42 from your prep notes; do not read them aloud. Then one strong reader for 43:1-12, slowly; this is the summit of the book. Hold 44:1-3 back until question 9.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

A dated hope

1. Look at 40:1-4. What details of time, place, and instruction does Ezekiel give us before the tour begins, and why might each one matter?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Three details. Time: the twenty-fifth year of the exile, fourteen years after the city fell, dated as precisely as the oracles of doom were; God stamps his promises with dates just as he stamped his judgments. Place: in the visions of God, on a very high mountain in the land of Israel; the text itself tells us what genre we are in, and the precise geographical referent is debated. Instruction: look, listen, set your mind on everything, and declare it to the house of Israel. Ezekiel is shown this not as a private consolation but as a message. After thirteen sessions of watching this book, the group should notice the mood change: the countdown clock has become a promise with a timestamp.

Dig Deeper

The twenty-fifth year, at the beginning of the year on the tenth day of the month, has struck many scholars as pointed: the tenth day of the seventh month is the Day of Atonement, when the jubilee trumpet sounded (Leviticus 25:9), and twenty-five is half of fifty, the jubilee number, as if the exile has reached the turn toward release. It is a suggestive proposal, not a certainty; offer it as such.

2. After the flyover of chapters 40 to 42: why do you think God gives a grieving people a temple in exact measurements, gate by gate and cubit by cubit, rather than a paragraph of comfort?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Let them argue this one. Strong answers: measurement means intention; nobody drafts a floor plan for a building they do not mean to inhabit. Measurement means order and holiness; the courts rise step by step toward the center, and you always know how near the Holy One you stand. Measurement makes a promise definite instead of a mood; vague comfort evaporates, but a blueprint can be held. And 43:10-11, which they will reach shortly, gives God's own reason: the plan itself is meant to be shown to Israel. One caution to plant now, gently: notice that in the whole vision, no one is ever commanded to build it.

The glory comes back

Live discovery

Split into two teams. Team one, go to Ezekiel 10:18-19 and report: when the glory left the temple building, where did it pause, and at which gate? Team two, go to Ezekiel 11:22-23 and report: when the glory left the city altogether, where did it stop, and in which direction? Then we will read 43:1-5 together and compare.

Let them find it. Ezekiel 10:18-19; Ezekiel 11:22-23

3. Before we talk about 43:1-5, we need to check something against our own past. Where exactly did the glory go when it left, back in session 4?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Team one finds the glory leaving the threshold and pausing at the east gate of the house of the LORD. Team two finds it going up from the midst of the city and standing on the mountain east of the city. Then 43:1-5: Ezekiel is brought to the gate facing east, the glory of the God of Israel comes from the east, enters by the east gate, and fills the house. It is an exact reversal, the same road walked in the opposite direction. God retraces his steps (that image is ours, not the text's, but it is what the geography shows). When this lands, name the thread: we have been following the glory since the first night of this study. Tonight it came home.

4. In 43:3 Ezekiel insists this is the same vision he saw by the river Chebar, and the same he saw when the city was destroyed. Why does it matter that the returning glory is the same glory?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Because it means God did not come back changed, softened, or replaced. The glory that judged Jerusalem and the

glory that comes home are one; his holiness and his mercy are not two gods taking turns. It also means the exiles' strange consolation was real: the glory they saw in Babylon in chapter 1 was never a lesser, travel-sized presence but the same throne that had filled the temple. And it certifies the seer: one witness has seen all three appearances, so the promise carries the same authority as the judgments that came true on schedule.

5. Read 43:6-9 again. What does God claim this place is, how long does he intend to stay, and what does he ask of Israel in return?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He calls it the place of his throne and the place of the soles of his feet, where he will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel for ever. The word to sit with is 'for ever.' The tabernacle was left, Shiloh was left, Solomon's temple was left; every previous dwelling was forfeitable, and this one is declared permanent. The condition: no more defiling his holy name, no more harlotry (the group will hear chapter 16 in that word), no more royal corruption pressed up against his sanctuary. Connect it to session 12: a permanent dwelling is only possible among a people with new hearts, which is exactly what God promised to supply himself. The permanence rests on his gift, not on their improvement.

Dig Deeper

The complaint about the kings, their thresholds beside God's threshold with only a wall between, seems to reflect the old palace-temple complex, where royal burials and royal politics crowded the sanctuary. In the vision, the prince gets an honored place, but the throne belongs to God alone.

6. In 43:10-12, God tells Ezekiel to describe the temple to the house of Israel 'that they may be ashamed of their iniquities.' How can a floor plan make anyone ashamed? And what is 'the law of the temple' in verse 12?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. If the group stalls, ask: has seeing something beautiful ever made you ashamed of your own mess, in a way that made you clean up rather than give up?

Ground. Draw the contrast explicitly: one room called most holy in Solomon's temple; a whole mountaintop called most holy here. Ask what direction holiness is moving.

Depth. Connect to 36:26-27: only a people carrying God's own Spirit could live on a mountain where everything is most holy. The architecture presumes the heart transplant.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The blueprint works like a mirror (our image): seeing in detail what God has prepared exposes in detail what they wasted. Shame here is not humiliation but the ache of recognizing squandered love, the same movement as 16:61 and 36:31, where remembering under mercy leads home rather than into despair. The law of the temple in verse 12: the whole territory on top of the mountain shall be most holy. In the old temple, 'most holy' was one small room; now it is the entire summit. Holiness is expanding outward past the building's walls. Say no more than that; where the expansion ends up flowing is next week's discovery.

Where the glory landed

Live discovery

Two teams again. Team one, read John 1:14 and note the two key words: what did the Word do among us, and what did we behold? (Leader: the verb translated 'dwelt' is *eskenosen*, literally 'pitched his tent,' 'tabernacled.') Team two, read John 2:18-22 and answer: when Jesus says 'destroy this temple,' what temple does John say he meant?

Let them find it. John 1:14; John 2:18-22

7. This temple was never built. The exiles went home and built a different, humbler temple, and even Herod's grand rebuild followed another plan. So did the glory ever actually come back through the east gate? The New Testament thinks it has an answer. Let's find it.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Team one: the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, "and we have beheld his glory." John is deliberately using tabernacle language: the glory that filled the tent and the temple has taken up residence in flesh. Team two: "he spoke of the temple of his body." Put the two together and the New Testament's claim comes into focus: Christians have read the return of the glory as fulfilled above all in Christ, not in masonry. That is the tradition's reading of Ezekiel, not a definition of the Church. One more correspondence to offer, marked as suggestive rather than proof: the mountain east of the city where the glory stood in 11:23 is the Mount of Olives, and the Gospels show Jesus entering the temple from precisely that direction.

8. But wait. Is reading the temple as Jesus actually fair to Ezekiel? Let's give the other reading its full strength before we answer.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. The most natural reading of a blueprint is a building. Ezekiel gives dimensions, gate by gate, cubit by cubit; 43:10-11 even commands that the plan be written down before Israel's eyes so that they may observe and perform it. Many sincere Christians therefore hold that this temple will be literally built in a future age, with its worship restored, and the careful ones anticipate the obvious objection: the offerings of chapters 43 to 46, they say, are memorial and commemorative rather than atoning, looking back at the cross the way the Mass does, so that nothing in the vision competes with Hebrews. On that reading the plan can be literal without unsaying Calvary. Prophecies of the exile's end came true literally; the fall of Jerusalem came true literally; on what principle do we suddenly go symbolic in chapter 40? Isn't the honest reading the literal one?

Answering from the text. Take it seriously; it is a real reading held by serious people, and its instinct, that God keeps his promises concretely, is right. But answer from the text first. The vision calls itself "visions of God" and sets the temple on a very high mountain that matches no geography in Judah; it never commands construction, only contemplation and shame unto conversion; and its own law, the whole mountaintop most holy, is already bursting the categories of architecture. Then answer from the New Testament, which is the Christian's inspired commentary: Jesus says the temple to be destroyed and raised is his body; Hebrews 10:11-14 teaches that by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. Meet the memorial version squarely rather than the crude one: the Church's difficulty with it is Christological before it is textual, since the one memorial the New Testament gives us of that sacrifice is the Eucharist, and a restored Levitical system alongside it would be a second sign of the same reality with no warrant in the New Testament; and John, granted the Bible's final vision of the world to come, reports: "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Revelation 21:22). The

fulfillment is not less literal than a building; it is more solid. God did not keep the promise in a smaller key than he gave it, but in a greater one. And note the honest latitude: the Church has not bound Catholics to one verse-by-verse exegesis of these chapters; what is fixed is that Christ is the true temple and his sacrifice is unrepeatable.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The literalist reading rightly insists God keeps promises concretely, but the vision's own features (a self-declared vision, an impossible mountain, no build order, holiness overflowing the floor plan) point past masonry, and the New Testament names the destination: the temple of his body, the once-for-all sacrifice, and finally a city with no temple because God and the Lamb are its temple. The promise is fulfilled in a greater key, not abandoned. Where the Church has not defined the details, we hold our reading with confidence and our neighbors with charity.

The sealed gate and the prince

9. Now read 44:1-3. Why is the east gate shut, and who is the one person allowed to sit in it? What do you make of each?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The gate is shut for a stated reason: the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut. God's door is sealed in honor; no foot traffic through the King's own entrance. The exception is the prince, the *nasi*, who may sit in the gate to eat bread before the LORD, entering by the vestibule. Two threads to pull gently. First, the prince: Ezekiel never calls him king, and he eats a covenant meal in the gate the LORD entered by; the group has met this figure before, the one whose right the crown is (21:27) and 'my servant David' (34:23-24). The book leaves him mysterious; so should we, while noticing that every mystery in this book has been leaning in the same direction. Second, the tradition's tender reading: St. Ambrose and the Latin tradition after him saw in this sealed gate, through which the Lord alone passed, a figure of Mary, ever-virgin, the one gate by which God entered the world. That is a spiritual reading, not the literal sense, and the doctrine does not rest on this verse (CCC 499); but it shows how the Church reads, always watching for the pattern of God's ways to repeat.

Dig Deeper

Why *nasi*, prince, rather than *melek*, king? Perhaps because in this vision there is only one throne, and 43:7 has already said whose it is. The Davidic figure reigns, but as one who serves at the King's gate; a shape that should look familiar by the time we reach the Gospels.

So what is this temple?

10. Put the whole evening on the table. This measured temple was never built, the glory returned to it in vision, Jesus called his body the temple, and Revelation's city has no temple at all. So when you read Ezekiel 40 to 48 as a Christian, what are you actually looking at?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Simplest version: ask, where can you go, this week, to sit near the returned glory? If someone says the tabernacle at church, the whole session has landed.

Ground. Walk the four landings in order: his body, his Church, your body, the city to come. Ask which one they find

hardest to believe.

Depth. Ask why God might prefer to fulfill a promise in a greater key than he gave it, and whether that changes how they read the promises they are still waiting on.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Resist the either/or; the Church reads Scripture in layered senses (CCC 117), and this vision rewards all of them. Literally: a true vision given to real exiles, a certified promise that God would dwell with his people again, drawn with the exactness of something meant. Spiritually, the fulfillment lands in ascending stages: the body of Christ, the true temple where the glory tabernacled (CCC 586); the Church, God's building of living stones (1 Peter 2:4-5; CCC 756); each baptized person, a temple of the Holy Spirit, which is session 12's promise with an address on it (1 Corinthians 6:19; CCC 1197); and finally the heavenly Jerusalem, where the scaffolding of temple drops away because God himself is the dwelling. One honest hedge: the Church has not defined a single exhaustive interpretation of these chapters, so hold the layers with confidence and the details with humility. And one thing to feel before we close: 43:7 says for ever. Next week the book gets its last word, and it is about an address.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Is there a part of your life where you quietly assumed God left for good? What would change if you believed he intends to come back in through the same door he seemed to leave by?

S2. If your body really is a temple the glory has moved into, what is one honest way your week would look different if you lived like the Lord is in residence?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Make fifteen minutes before the tabernacle this week, more if you can. Bring Ezekiel 43:1-5 and read it slowly in front of the lamp; let that lamp be your east gate. That image is ours, not Ezekiel's; the lamp itself burns to mark the presence of the Blessed Sacrament reserved there.
2. Name one door in your life that grief or sin walked out through: a broken friendship, a habit, a season you gave up on. Bring that exact door to confession, or at least to ten minutes of honest prayer, and ask the Lord to come back in by it.
3. Each morning this week, pray one line before your feet hit the floor: 'Lord, this is the place of your throne; dwell here today.' Mean your own body, your room, your day.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 43:2

"And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east; and the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with his glory."

Ezekiel 43:2

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Father, your glory walked out of a defiled house slowly, as one who did not want to go, and tonight we watched it come home by the same gate. Thank you that you did not rebuild the old thing; you gave us something greater, your Son, the temple no one can tear down. Seal the gates of our hearts for you alone, make our bodies fit dwellings for your Spirit, and keep us hungry for the city where you are the temple and the light. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 40:1-4** date, mountain, the man with the measuring reed
- **Ezekiel 40:5-42:20** surveyed by the leader, not read aloud
- **Ezekiel 43:1-12** the glory returns; the throne; the law of the temple
- **Ezekiel 44:1-3** the shut east gate and the prince

Discovery passages

- **Ezekiel 10:18-19** glory pauses at the east gate (team one)
- **Ezekiel 11:22-23** glory stands on the mountain east of the city (team two)
- **John 1:14** the Word tabernacled; we beheld his glory (team one)
- **John 2:18-22** the temple of his body (team two)

Supporting passages

- **Exodus 40:34-35** glory fills the tabernacle
- **1 Kings 8:10-11** glory fills Solomon's temple
- **Hebrews 10:11-14** one offering, for all time; steelman response
- **Revelation 21:22** no temple in the city; steelman response
- **Luke 19:37-45** Jesus approaches the temple from the east, over Olivet
- **Ezekiel 21:27** callback: the one whose right it is
- **Ezekiel 34:23-24** callback: my servant David, the prince
- **Ezekiel 37:26-28** callback: sanctuary in their midst for evermore
- **1 Corinthians 6:19** your body a temple of the Holy Spirit
- **1 Peter 2:4-5** living stones, a spiritual house

Terms

- ****kavod.**** glory; the weight and radiant presence of God himself
- ****nasi.**** prince; Ezekiel's word for the Davidic figure, pointedly not called king
- ****eskenosen.**** he pitched his tent, tabernacled (John 1:14)

Catechism

- **CCC 586.** Jesus identifies himself with the temple
- **CCC 1197.** Christ the true temple; Christians temples of the Spirit
- **CCC 756.** the Church as God's building and dwelling
- **CCC 117.** the spiritual senses of Scripture
- **CCC 499.** Mary's perpetual virginity

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 16. The River and the Name

Reading: Ezekiel 47:1-12; 48:30-35

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers the river of life flowing from the sanctuary, traces it for themselves into John 7 and Revelation 22, and ends where the book ends: a city whose new name is The LORD Is There.

Catholic Touchstone

The living water of the Holy Spirit, given in baptism and flowing from Christ the true temple, carries God's people toward the heavenly Jerusalem, where God himself dwells with men forever.

This is the last session, and Ezekiel saves his gentlest image for the end. After nine chapters of measured architecture, a trickle of water appears under the temple threshold, and the guide makes Ezekiel wade into it four times: ankles, knees, waist, and then water to swim in. It flows east, down into the deadest water on earth, and everything lives where it goes. Then the book closes not with the river but with a name: the city is no longer called Jerusalem but *YHWH-shammah*, The LORD is there. Tonight the group traces that river out of Ezekiel and into the New Testament with their own hands, answers the strongest literal-temple objection honestly, and watches five threads resolve at once. Plan for warmth, some laughter, and a little grief that the study is ending. Leave real silence before the closing prayer; sixteen weeks deserve it.

What You Need to Know

Where we are in the vision

Ezekiel 47 sits inside the great temple vision of chapters 40 to 48, dated to the twenty-fifth year of the exile (40:1), which the group surveyed last week. The glory returned through the east gate in chapter 43, and that gate was then sealed (44:2). Tonight's passage is what happens next: with God in residence, life starts leaking out of the building. The water emerges from below the threshold, passes south of the altar, and exits eastward, through the same side of the complex the glory used for both its departure and its return. The direction is not decoration. Everything in this book that matters has moved along that east-west axis.

The geography, and why it is impossible

The river runs east into the *Arabah*, the rift valley, and down into the Dead Sea. Two things make this openly miraculous rather than hydrological. First, the river deepens dramatically over roughly a mile and a quarter (four measurements of a thousand cubits) with no tributaries named; real rivers grow by addition, and this one grows from its source alone. Second, the Dead Sea is so saline that fish cannot live in it, yet Ezekiel sees fishermen spreading nets from En-gedi to En-eglaim over water 'of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea' (47:10). The vision is telling you, in its own vocabulary, that it exceeds engineering. That matters for the steelman later.

The feast behind John 7

The discovery moment sends half the room to John 7. Context helps you land it. Jesus speaks 'on the last day of the feast, the great day' of Tabernacles. The Mishnah, compiled around AD 200, describes a water-drawing rite for this feast: each day priests drew water from the pool of Siloam and poured it out at the altar, a prayer for rain and an enactment of the prophets' promised waters. We cannot be certain every detail of the rite as described matches Jesus's day exactly, but the substance is well attested. Against that backdrop, a Galilean standing up in the temple courts and crying out that the living water flows from him is not a gentle remark. It is a claim to be the sanctuary of Ezekiel 47.

The name

Ezekiel 48:35 gives the city a new name, *YHWH-shammah*, The LORD is there. Notice what the name is not. It is not 'The people are faithful,' not 'The walls are strong,' not even 'Jerusalem restored.' The entire book has been driving at this: the city's identity is not its architecture, its history, or its performance, but the presence of God. This verse is also where your study's title comes from, which the group may enjoy discovering on their own; do not point it out before question 9 gives them the chance.

A liturgical thread worth knowing

Every Eastertide, when the priest sprinkles the congregation with baptismal water, the Church sings the *Vidi aquam*: 'I saw water flowing from the temple, from its right side, and all to whom that water came were saved.' That antiphon is drawn directly from Ezekiel 47:1-2. The Church has been singing tonight's passage over her newly baptized for centuries. If your parish uses it, some of your group have heard Ezekiel 47 many times without knowing it.

Pastoral note for a final session

Sixteen weeks builds real bonds. Expect some in the room to be wistful, and expect at least one person to be quietly aware that they are still, so to speak, at the ankles of the river. Do not press. The chapter itself is patient: the guide walks Ezekiel deeper a thousand cubits at a time, and God does the same with souls. End with gratitude and a concrete next step (the Live It practices point toward adoration and baptismal memory), not with pressure to feel a conclusion.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Eden, restored and exceeded

Genesis 2:10 has a river flowing out of Eden to water the garden, and the tree of life at its center. Ezekiel 47 quietly rebuilds that scene: water from God's dwelling, trees on both banks whose leaves never wither. But Ezekiel exceeds Eden. There is one tree of life in Genesis; here there are trees on both sides bearing fresh fruit every month, with leaves for healing. Ezekiel has already used Eden by name for what was lost (28:13; 36:35). Now he shows it coming back larger than it left.

The prophets saw the same water

Psalms 46:4 sings, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High", which is striking because the earthly Jerusalem has no river at all. Joel promises a fountain flowing from the house of the LORD, and Zechariah promises living waters flowing out from Jerusalem. Ezekiel's vision is the fullest map of a water source the whole prophetic tradition could see from a distance.

- Psalm 46:4, the river that gladdens a city that has no river
- Joel 3:18, a fountain from the house of the LORD

- Zechariah 14:8, living waters from Jerusalem, flowing east and west

Fulfillment: the temple becomes a person, then a city

The New Testament takes Ezekiel's river and relocates its source twice. First to a person: Jesus calls his own body the temple (John 2:21), cries out at Tabernacles that the thirsty should come to him and drink (John 7:37-39, which John explicitly interprets as the Spirit), and on the cross pours water from his opened side (John 19:34). Then to a city: Revelation 22 lifts Ezekiel 47 almost line by line, the river, the monthly fruit, the healing leaves, but the source is no longer a building; it is "the throne of God and of the Lamb", in a city that contains no temple at all because "its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Revelation 21:22). Ezekiel's last verse and Revelation's last chapter are the same promise: God dwelling with his people is the end of the story.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, d. c. 107

Writing to the Church in Rome while being transported to his martyrdom, St. Ignatius says in substance that he no longer takes pleasure in corruptible food or in the delights of this life; what he desires is the bread of God, the flesh of Jesus Christ, and he describes a living water within him, speaking inside him and saying, Come to the Father.

Letter to the Romans 7. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Ezekiel's river is not scenery to admire from the bank. For the baptized it flows inside, and it is going somewhere: toward the Father. Ignatius felt its current strongly enough to follow it through a Roman arena.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, d. 386

Teaching candidates for baptism, St. Cyril asks why Scripture calls the grace of the Spirit water, and answers in substance: because water comes down from heaven as one and the same thing, yet works differently in everything that receives it, becoming white in the lily and red in the rose; so the one Spirit, remaining one and undivided, apportions his grace to each person as he wills.

Catechetical Lectures 16 (On the Holy Spirit). Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. One river, sixteen weeks, and it has not been doing the same thing in any two people in this room. That is not a flaw in the water; it is how this water works.

St. Augustine, d. 430

There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end.

The City of God 22.30.

For the group. Augustine wrote this as the final sentence of a twenty-two book work, describing the city Ezekiel could only name. A study that began with a shattered priest in a refugee camp ends where Augustine ends: at rest, in the city where the LORD is.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 694. Water is the primary symbol of the Holy Spirit's action: the water of baptism signifies and effects new birth, and the Spirit is the living water welling up from Christ crucified for eternal life.

CCC 1137. Describing the heavenly liturgy through the book of Revelation, the Catechism points to the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb; the Church's worship on earth participates in that scene.

CCC 1044. In the new universe, the heavenly Jerusalem, God will have his dwelling among men and wipe away every tear; Ezekiel's closing name for the city states the same destiny.

CCC 2550. Quoting St. Augustine on the end of the journey: God himself will be the goal of our desires, contemplated without end, loved without surfeit, praised without weariness.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

The LORD is there (resolve). This is the night the thread gives the study its title. Let question 9 do the work; do not announce the resolution before the group reads 48:35 aloud and someone notices the study booklet cover. If nobody notices, ask them to look at the cover.

The everlasting covenant (resolve). The covenant of peace promised in 16:60, 34:25, and 37:26 lands here: the city with God in it forever is what the covenant was always for. Name the arc briefly in the answer to question 9.

Whose right it is (resolve). The crown removed in 21:27 finds its head in the discovery: Revelation's river flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The one whose right it is now sits enthroned at the river's source. Resolve inside question 6.

Son of man (resolve). Close it gently and honestly: Ezekiel is addressed as son of man some ninety times, a title of creatureliness. Jesus's own use of the title draws most directly on Daniel 7's glorious figure, but it carries Ezekiel's humility inside it: the true Son of Man is both the lowly prophet-figure and the enthroned one. Do not overclaim a straight Ezekiel-to-Jesus line; the honest statement is richer.

The hairs in the hem (resolve). Planted in session 3 (Ezekiel 5:3, a few hairs bound in the prophet's hem while the rest burned) and untouched since session 4. Resolve it in question 8: the tiny remnant God bound into the hem has become a city with twelve open gates bearing every tribe's name. Flagged for Corey in uncertainties since the thread lay dormant a long time; give it one warm sentence, not a lecture.

Follow the glory (echo). Resolved last week. Tonight, one callback only: the water exits east, through the gate the glory used to leave and to return. The glory came home; now life flows out the door.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

A city named 'The LORD is there' was never built. Isn't this just wishful thinking dressed up as prophecy, comfort literature for people whose real city was ashes?

Ezekiel earned the right to be trusted about the far future by being verifiably right about the near future: the dated oracle of chapter 24 announced the siege on the day it began, and the fugitive's report in 33:21 confirmed the fall Ezekiel had said would follow, which the group discovered in session 9. And the New Testament claims the promise did land, not as municipal construction but as Emmanuel, God with us, and finally as the city of Revelation 21 to 22. Whether that fulfillment satisfies is a question of faith, but it is not evasion; it is the reading the earliest Christians staked their lives on.

Verse 11 says the swamps and marshes are left salty. If this river heals everything, why does the vision leave dead spots? Doesn't a loving God heal it all?

Be honest that readers differ. Some see practical provision: salt was essential for life and for covenant offerings, so salt flats are a gift, not a curse. Others hear a sober note: even beside the river of life, it remains possible to be a marsh, holding the water without letting it flow through. The Church's teaching on freedom supports the second reading without requiring it: God's grace is resistible, and heaven is never forced on anyone. Present both and let the tension stand; the text does.

Session Goals

1. Trace the river from the temple threshold to the Dead Sea and notice that it deepens from its source alone, with no tributaries.
2. Discover, from John 7 and Revelation 22 directly, where the New Testament locates the river's true source.
3. Hear the literal-future-temple reading at full strength and answer it from the text itself, with honest latitude where the Church has not defined details.
4. Read the twelve gates and the city's new name as the resolution of the whole book, closing the remaining threads.
5. Send everyone out with a concrete way to live near the river: baptismal memory and the Eucharistic presence.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

Roughly: Win 10 minutes, reading 8, Build 50 to 55, Send and Live It 10, closing 5 with real silence before the prayer. Question 10, the whole-book round, is the most likely to run long; cap answers at one sentence each and enforce it kindly. The discovery in question 5 works best in two teams working simultaneously, about 8 minutes total including report-back.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper cross-references (Psalm 46, Joel, Zechariah) first.
2. Fold question 3's En-gedi fishing detail into question 2's answer and move on.
3. Drop question 6 and let the discovery report-back carry the throne point.
4. If still pressed, compress question 8's gates into one summary sentence from you, but do not cut question 9 or question 10; they are the destination of sixteen weeks.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, sixteen weeks ago you showed us your glory on wheels in a refugee camp, and we have been following it ever since. Tonight, at the end of the book, bring us to the water. Holy Spirit, living water promised through Ezekiel and poured out from the side of Christ, flow through this room one more time: deepen what is shallow in us, freshen what has gone salt, and heal what is withered. We ask it through Jesus Christ our Lord, the true temple, who lives and reigns with you forever and ever. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. What is the best ending you have ever encountered, in a book, a film, or a series? What made it satisfying instead of disappointing?

W2. Think of a place where you have felt completely at home. What made it home?

Both questions are aimed at tonight without saying so: this is an ending, and it is about what makes a place home. Do not connect the dots for them yet.

Read

Read aloud

Two readers. Reader one takes Ezekiel 47:1-12 slowly, pausing a beat at each of the four measurements so the room feels the water rising. Reader two takes 48:30-35. Consider having everyone stand for the final verse; it is the last verse of the book, and the group has earned it.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The water under the threshold

1. Look closely at 47:1-2. Where exactly does the water begin, and which direction does it flow? Given everything this book has shown us, why does that direction matter?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The water issues from below the threshold of the temple itself, passes south of the altar, and flows east. East is the loaded direction of this whole book: the glory departed eastward over the mountain (11:23), returned from the east (43:2), and the east gate was then sealed because the LORD had entered by it (44:2). The gate is shut, but the building leaks. With God in residence, life comes out under the door. The trickle at the threshold is the first visible consequence of the glory coming home.

Measured into the deep

2. Four times the guide measures a thousand cubits and walks Ezekiel into the water (47:3-5). What happens at each measurement, and what is strange about a river that behaves this way?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. If the group stalls, just ask: what would it feel like, physically, to be at each of those four depths?

Ground. At which depth do you stop being in control? (Roughly the waist; by swimming depth the river decides where you go.)

Depth. If the water is grace, what would 'ankle-deep' living look like concretely, and what would it cost to let the current take your feet off the bottom?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Ankle-deep, knee-deep, up to the waist, and then 'a river that I could not pass through', water to swim in. The strange part: no tributaries are ever mentioned. Real rivers deepen because other streams join them; this one deepens from its source alone. The farther it gets from the sanctuary, the more of it there is, which is the opposite of how influence usually works. Whatever this water is, distance does not dilute it. Notice too that the guide does not let Ezekiel watch from the bank; he is made to wade in at every stage, until the only options are swimming or turning back.

3. Follow the river in 47:8-10. Where does it go, and what does it do when it arrives?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It descends the *Arabah* into the sea, and 'when it enters the stagnant waters of the sea, the water will become fresh.' That sea is the Dead Sea, water so salty nothing can live in it. Ezekiel sees fishermen spreading nets from En-gedi to En-eglaim over fish 'of very many kinds', and the verdict is total: 'so everything will live where the river goes' (47:9). The river does not avoid the deadest place in the land; it heads straight for it. Whatever in a life looks most permanently dead is precisely where this water is aimed.

Dig Deeper

Verse 11 is a wrinkle: the swamps and marshes are 'left for salt.' Readers differ on whether that is provision (salt was needed for life and for offerings) or a warning (it is possible to sit beside the river and stay salt). The text does not settle it. What do you make of it?

4. Read 47:12 again slowly. What do the trees do, why do they do it, and where in the Bible have we seen a river with trees like this before?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Trees on both banks, leaves that never wither, fresh fruit every month, leaves for healing, and the text gives the reason twice over: 'because the water for them flows from the sanctuary.' The scene is Eden, the river flowing out of the garden and the tree of life (Genesis 2), which Ezekiel has already invoked by name for what was lost (28:13; 36:35). But this is Eden exceeded: not one tree of life but banks lined with them, and fruit twelve months a year. The

book that began in exile ends past the garden gate, going the right direction this time.

Dig Deeper

Ezekiel is not the only prophet who saw this water. Look at Psalm 46:4 (a river gladdening a city that, in geography, has no river), Joel 3:18, and Zechariah 14:8. The whole prophetic tradition could hear this water from a distance.

The river leaves the book

Live discovery

Team one: John 7:37-39, and note carefully what verse 39 says the water means. Team two: Revelation 22:1-5, and list every detail you recognize from tonight's chapter.

Let them find it. John 7:37-39; Revelation 22:1-5

5. Ezekiel's river does not stay in Ezekiel. Two teams, five minutes, then report back. Each team answers three questions about its passage: where is the river, what is its source, and what does it do?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Team one finds Jesus at the climax of the feast of Tabernacles, a feast whose rites poured out water at the altar, crying out: "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink." The scripture's rivers of living water are read christologically as flowing from him, though the grammar of verse 38 is genuinely disputed and may refer to the believer; what verse 39 settles is what the water is: 'this he said about the Spirit.' The source of Ezekiel's river is a person, and the water is the Holy Spirit. Team two finds Ezekiel 47 rebuilt almost line by line: the river of the water of life, "bright as crystal", the tree of life on either side of the river, twelve kinds of fruit, fruit each month, "and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." But the source has moved: not a temple threshold, but "the throne of God and of the Lamb." Ezekiel saw the river start under a building. John saw it start in a body. Revelation sees it start from a throne, forever.

6. Stay with team two's city a moment. Look one page back at Revelation 21:22. What is missing from that city, and why is it not a loss?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb." The temple is not demolished; it is outgrown. A temple exists to house a presence, and when the presence fills everything, the container retires. Notice also who shares the throne at the river's source: the Lamb. In session 8 we met the riddle of 21:27, the crown set aside 'until he comes whose right it is.' Here is the resolution: the one whose right it is now sits enthroned, and he turns out to be a Lamb who was slain. The crown found its head, and the head still bears the marks of thorns.

Dig Deeper

One more river sighting: John 19:34, blood and water from the pierced side of Christ. Many Fathers saw the

sacraments flowing from that opened side, the church born from the side of the new Adam as Eve from the old. The Eastertide sprinkling antiphon, the *Vidi aquam*, sets Ezekiel 47:1-2 to music: 'I saw water flowing from the temple, from its right side.' The Church has been singing tonight's chapter over the newly baptized for centuries.

But is it a blueprint?

7. Before we finish, we owe the strongest opposing reading a fair hearing. Listen to it at full strength, and then answer it from the text, not from preference.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Ezekiel 40 to 48 is the least metaphorical writing in the Bible. It is gate by gate, cubit by cubit; a competent architect could draft working drawings from it. God does not dictate blueprints for symbols. And chapter 47 names real geography: the Arabah, the Dead Sea, En-gedi. Many serious, Bible-loving Christians therefore conclude that the honest reading is a literal future temple with a literal river, perhaps in a future earthly reign of Christ, and that the spiritual reading, whatever its merits, is not what Ezekiel's first hearers would have understood. The most careful proponents do not put the temple in the eternal state at all; they place it in an intermediate messianic era, and they read its offerings as memorial rather than atoning, precisely to avoid contradicting Hebrews.

Answering from the text. Take it seriously; it is not a foolish reading, and its instinct (that God keeps his promises concretely) is right. But three things push back. First, the text itself refuses to behave like engineering: a river that deepens with no tributaries, a sea that turns fresh, trees that ignore seasons. The measurements convey certainty and holiness, and then the vision deliberately breaks its own physics to show it is describing something measurements cannot hold. Second, the move from building to person was not made by a defensive church centuries later; it was made by John: 'he spoke of the temple of his body' (John 2:21), the Tabernacles cry, the pierced side, and Revelation rebuilding Ezekiel's river in a city with no temple in it. That answers the eternal-state version; against the intermediate-era version it shows only where the story ends, not what may lie between. Third, the Church has rejected millenarian schemes that claim to realize the definitive kingdom within history (CCC 676), which bears on some of these proposals though it does not adjudicate every reading of the measurements, and Hebrews teaches that the old sacrifices are ended by the one sacrifice of Christ, which makes a restored sacrificial temple hard to square with the gospel itself. Where the Church has not defined the meaning of every cubit, we hold details with open hands. But the direction of fulfillment, from Ezekiel's vision to Christ the temple to the city where God is all in all, is the New Testament's own reading, not our invention.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The literalist instinct is honored, not mocked: God does fulfill concretely. But the vision breaks its own physics on purpose, John relocates the temple to the body of Jesus and the river to the Spirit, and Revelation's final city has no temple at all. The fulfillment is more literal than a building: God actually dwelling with actual people forever. Details the Church has not defined, we hold with honest latitude.

The gates and the name

8. Now the book's last paragraph, 48:30-34. What is written on the city's twelve gates, and why does that matter after everything this book has said?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Each gate bears the name of a tribe of Israel, all twelve, including the northern tribes that had been scattered for a century and a half and that everyone else had written off. This is chapter 37's two sticks made one, cast in architecture: the restoration takes in all Israel, and the gates are how you get in, not how you are kept out. Revelation keeps the image: twelve gates, twelve tribes (21:12). And one small, old thread ties off here. In session 3 we watched Ezekiel bind a few hairs into the hem of his garment while the rest burned: a tiny, spared remnant carried against the prophet's own body. Tonight the arithmetic of the hem is finished. The handful God kept has become a city, and every gate has a family name on it.

9. Ezekiel 48:35 is the last verse of the whole book, and it gives the city a new name. What is the name, what is it pointedly not, and why is it the only right last word for this book? (While you think about it, take a look at the cover of your study guide.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"And the name of the city henceforth shall be, The LORD is there." In Hebrew, *YHWH-shammah*. Notice what the name is not: not 'The people are finally faithful,' not 'The walls are rebuilt,' not even 'Jerusalem.' Henceforth, the verse says, this is the city's name; and the whole vision of chapters 40 to 48 never once says Jerusalem. The old city's identity died in chapter 24 when it fell as the dated word had said. The book's disaster was never really the Babylonians; it was the glory walking out (chapters 8 to 11). So the book's happy ending cannot be prosperity or security; it can only be the presence coming back and staying. Every promise we have traced converges on this verse: 'I have been a sanctuary to them' (11:16), the new heart and the Spirit within (36:26-27), 'my dwelling place shall be with them' (37:27), the glory returning through the east gate (43:4), and the everlasting covenant of peace beneath all of it. The covenant was never a contract for services; it was always aimed at cohabitation. And yes, this verse is where the study's title has been hiding for sixteen weeks.

The whole book in one breath

10. Last question of the study. Chapter 1: a shattered priest in a refugee camp sees the glory of God on wheels, six hundred miles from the temple. Chapter 48: a city named The LORD is there. One sentence each, no more: what did God do between those two verses?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

There is no single right sentence; let every answer stand, and expect them to gather the threads without prompting: he warned through a watchman, he walked out of his own house rather than share it with idols, he remembered a covenant his bride broke, he refused to let anyone hide behind their parents' guilt, he acted for his own name's sake when nothing else was left to act for, he fired the shepherds and took the crook himself, he swapped the stone heart for flesh, he breathed on dead bones, and he came home through the east gate. If a summary is wanted after the round, offer this: between chapter 1 and chapter 48, God proved that he is defeated neither by the sin of his people nor by the loss of his house, because his real project was never the house; it was them. Those who wrote sealed guesses in week one and opened them in week eleven may enjoy one last look: the question was where God would choose to dwell, and the book's answer is the last word of its last verse.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. The city's name says that God's presence is the point of everything else. Where in your ordinary week, a place, a time, a person, could you start practicing the truth that the LORD is there?

S2. Looking back across all sixteen sessions, what is one thing Ezekiel has changed about how you see God, and who is one person you could tell about it this month?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Spend twenty minutes this week before the tabernacle, in adoration or simply in an open church. The lamp is burning because the LORD is there. Bring nothing to accomplish; just be in the city.
2. Every time you bless yourself with holy water this week, do it slowly, and remember where that water starts: shallow at the door, deeper the farther in you go.
3. Read the last two chapters of the Bible in one sitting, out loud if you can, and count how many things you now recognize from Ezekiel.
4. Write one sentence naming what these sixteen weeks changed for you. Keep it somewhere you will find it in a year, and share it with one person before the month is out.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 48:35

"And the name of the city henceforth shall be, The LORD is there."

Ezekiel 48:35

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Father, you did not stay on the far side of the river you made. You crossed it: through a prophet's opened mouth, through a heart of flesh, through your Son, the temple no army could keep down, and through the Spirit poured out like water on everything dead in us. Thank you for these sixteen weeks and for every person in this room. Send us out along the river; make us deeper than our ankles; aim us at the salt places we would rather avoid. And when our story ends, let it end the way the book ends: bring us home to the city whose gates carry the names of your people, the city called The LORD Is There. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 47:1-12** the river from the sanctuary
- **Ezekiel 48:30-35** the gates and the name

Callbacks within Ezekiel

- **Ezekiel 5:3** the hairs bound in the hem (session 3)
- **Ezekiel 11:16, 23** sanctuary in exile; glory departs east
- **Ezekiel 21:27** until he comes whose right it is (session 8)
- **Ezekiel 28:13; 36:35** Eden named
- **Ezekiel 36:26-27; 37:26-28** new heart; dwelling forever
- **Ezekiel 43:1-5; 44:1-2** glory returns by the east gate; gate sealed

Discovery passages

- **John 7:37-39** team one
- **Revelation 22:1-5** team two

Roots and echoes

- **Genesis 2:8-10** Eden's river and the tree of life
- **Psalms 46:4** the river that gladdens the city of God
- **Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8** the prophets' living waters (Dig Deeper)
- **John 2:19-21** the temple of his body
- **John 19:34** water from the pierced side (Dig Deeper)
- **Revelation 21:3, 12, 22** dwelling with men; twelve gates; no temple

Terms

- ****YHWH-shammah.**** The LORD is there; the city's new name, Ezekiel 48:35
- ****Arabah.**** the rift valley running down to the Dead Sea
- ****Vidi aquam.**** I saw water; the Eastertide sprinkling antiphon drawn from Ezekiel 47:1-2

Catechism

- **CCC 694.** water as symbol of the Spirit in baptism
- **CCC 1137.** the heavenly liturgy and the river from the throne
- **CCC 1044.** God's dwelling among men in the new Jerusalem
- **CCC 2550.** Augustine on the end without end