

The LORD Is There

Session 1. The Throne on Wheels

The heavens opened in Babylon: God's throne has wheels, and it rolled into the one place his people were sure he could not be.

What We Found

Ezekiel was a priest, and many interpreters read the thirtieth year of 1:1 as his own age, the year priestly service would ordinarily have begun in Jerusalem. Instead he was a deportee sitting by an irrigation canal in Babylonia, and that is exactly where the heavens opened. The vision's most shocking detail is its address line: God's glory appeared in enemy territory, to a man in the one place his vocation seemed impossible.

The vision itself, four living creatures facing every direction, wheels within wheels full of eyes, a sapphire throne above it all, adds up to one discovery: this is a throne that travels. God was never a prisoner of his own temple, so no army could evict him and no exile can cut his people off from him. Ezekiel's careful, breaking grammar ('the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD') told us something too: God exceeds every word we have, and the honest response is Ezekiel's, face to the ground.

And it ended with the prophet face down. Ezekiel does not describe himself studying the vision; he describes himself flattened by it, hearing a voice begin to speak. The chapter stops mid-sentence on purpose. What the voice says is next week.

Voices of the Church

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. This strange chapter has fed popes and beginners alike; it will meet you at your 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 have been read for eighteen centuries as a portrait of the four Gospels.

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. If you feel far from the place where your faith once made sense: the place changed; God did not.

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

My Guess

Seal this and do not look at it again until we open it

Tonight Ezekiel saw the glory of God in Babylon, hundreds of miles from the temple. Write one sentence: by the end of this book, where do you think God will choose to dwell? Write your sentence below, then fold this sheet (or seal it in an envelope) and bring it back next week. Your leader will keep it unopened; the guesses will be opened together later in the study.

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 300.** God is greater than all his works, yet present to his creatures everywhere
- **CCC 42.** God exceeds our language; that is why Ezekiel writes 'the appearance of the likeness'
- **CCC 104.** in Scripture the Father meets his children; the Church finds her nourishment there, like a prophet eating a scroll

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 2:1-3:15 before we meet again.

The LORD Is There

Session 2. The Scroll and the Sending

God fed his prophet before he sent him: a scroll full of grief that tasted like honey, and a week of sitting in silence before a single word was spoken.

What We Found

God called Ezekiel 'son of man', a mortal, and then told him to stand. Before he could obey, the Spirit set him on his feet. That order is the whole Christian life in two verses: God commands, and God supplies what the command requires, and the standing is still really ours.

We read the job description and found what was missing from it. Rebels, briars, thorns and scorpions, and twice over, whether they hear or refuse to hear. Ezekiel is made responsible for speaking. He is not made responsible for the response, and God says so twice. For anyone worn out from trying to manage how other people receive the faith, that line is a mercy rather than a loophole.

Then God handed him a scroll written on both sides, full of lamentation and mourning and woe, and told him to eat it. It tasted sweet as honey. We held those two facts side by side without smoothing them out: the sweetness is not the subject matter, it is whose word it is. We found Jeremiah saying he ate God's words and they became the joy of his heart, and we found John, six centuries later, eating the same kind of scroll and reporting the aftertaste Ezekiel left us to guess: sweet in the mouth, bitter in the stomach, and then sent out to speak again.

The night ended where the chapter ends. Ezekiel goes in bitterness, with the hand of the LORD strong upon him, and sits among the exiles for seven days without saying anything. Obedience and devastation in the same sentence, and the book does not call that a failure. Before he preaches to them, he sits where they sit.

Voices of the Church

St. Jerome, d. 420

Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.

Commentary on Isaiah, prologue.

For the group. The Catechism quotes this line (CCC 133) when it urges every Catholic to read Scripture often. Ezekiel had to fill his stomach with the scroll before he opened his mouth; the same word is on your shelf.

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 insists too that no one can pour out what he has not first taken in.

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

For the group. If you have ever finished a chapter of the Bible and felt nothing, Gregory's answer is not to read faster. It is to stay longer.

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. This is the practical shape of eating the word, and it fits in ten minutes. Read, then answer.

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, out loud, and keep the faithfulness that is actually yours.
3. Sit with someone in something hard this week without offering a solution. Ezekiel gave seven days; 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

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 104.** in the sacred books the Father meets his children and speaks with them
- **CCC 133.** the Church urges frequent reading of Scripture; Jerome's warning about ignorance of it
- **CCC 2653.** prayer should accompany the reading of Scripture, so that it becomes a dialogue
- **CCC 2708.** meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion and desire

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 3:16-5:17 before we meet again.

The LORD Is There

Session 3. The Watchman and the Brick

God made Ezekiel responsible for the warning, never for the results, and then made the man's own body the sermon.

What We Found

God appointed Ezekiel a watchman, and the job description was startlingly precise: hear the word from God's mouth and pass on the warning. That is the whole duty. Whether anyone listens, turns, or lives was never placed on the watchman's shoulders. For anyone exhausted by trying to control other people's souls, that line between faithfulness and outcomes is a mercy, not a loophole.

We watched the charge outlive the prophet: an apostle saying farewell to a church he founded echoed Ezekiel's language of blood and warning (Acts 20:26-31), and handed the watch on to the shepherds of the Church. The watchman's trumpet is still in service, and in some measure it is in our hands.

Then God did something stranger than words. He silenced his prophet except when God himself opened his mouth, and preached through the man's body instead: a city scratched on a Babylonian brick with an iron plate set between the prophet and the city, months lying on one side bearing the measured weight of the people's sin, siege rations eaten in public, a shaved head divided into thirds. And hidden in the hair sign, a small mercy: a few hairs bound into the hem of the garment, kept close, though verse 4 sends some even of those into the fire.

We also caught the God behind the hard commands listening: when Ezekiel objected from conscience to one detail, God adjusted it. Obedience and honest dialogue with God are not enemies.

Voices of the Church

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.

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

Ready Response

When a friend says: real love never tells someone they're wrong.

A watchman who sees the sword coming and stays quiet isn't loving the city; he's abandoning it.

The Church counts warning and advising among the works of mercy, right alongside feeding the hungry, because sometimes the truth is the food someone needs.

But the watchman only sounds the trumpet; he never forces anyone into shelter. Real love warns, and then respects freedom.

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 1146.** God reaches us, body and spirit, through physical signs
- **CCC 1829.** charity includes fraternal correction
- **CCC 1868.** culpable silence can make us share in others' sins
- **CCC 2447.** instructing and advising are spiritual works of mercy

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 8-11 before we meet again, in one sitting if you can.

The LORD Is There

Session 4. The Glory Walks Out

The glory left the temple in slow, grieving steps, and God promised to be a sanctuary himself to the very people everyone said he had abandoned.

What We Found

Ezekiel was carried in vision from Babylon to Jerusalem and shown four scenes inside the temple, each worse than the last and ending in the most sacred courtyard of all: an idol at the gate, elders burning incense in a hidden room, women mourning a foreign god, and men between the porch and the altar with their backs to the temple, worshiping the sun. In the dark room the elders told themselves, 'The LORD does not see us.' He saw everything.

Before any judgment fell, God sent a man in linen to put a mark on the forehead of everyone who sighed and groaned over the sin of the city. The qualification was not perfection; it was grief. Before judgment began, the man in linen passed through the city and marked them, and we found that Revelation echoes this marking: God's seal on the foreheads of his servants, and at the very end his name written there (Revelation 7:3; 22:4).

Then we watched the unthinkable. The glory of the LORD left the temple, but not all at once: it withdrew in stages, pausing at the threshold and again at the east gate, and finally stood still on the mountain east of the city. We identified that mountain, and we found that centuries later Jesus stood on that same ridge, looked at Jerusalem, and wept.

And buried inside the departure we found the promise the whole night was hiding. To the exiles everyone had written off, God said that he himself had been a sanctuary to them in the lands where they were scattered. Distance from the temple was not distance from God. He had moved with them, and he had moved first.

Voices of the Church

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 you sign your forehead at the Gospel, you 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 learned 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.

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

Ready Response

A friend going through the worst season of their life says: 'God is obviously done with me. Look where I am.' Using what we found tonight, what would you say?

Ezekiel saw the glory of God in Babylon before he ever saw it leave Jerusalem.

God's own words to people in exactly that place: I have been a sanctuary to them in the countries where they have gone.

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 586.** Jesus identifies himself with the Temple, God's definitive dwelling among men
- **CCC 1179.** New Covenant worship is not tied exclusively to one place
- **CCC 1197.** Christ is the true temple; Christians become temples of the Spirit
- **CCC 1296.** the seal on the forehead marks our total belonging to Christ

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 12-14 before we meet again.

The LORD Is There

Session 5. Whitewash and Idols of the Heart

The idols did not die when the statues fell; they changed address.

What We Found

We watched Ezekiel pack refugee baggage and dig through his own wall while the neighbours shrugged, and we learned why: a rebellious house filters sermons, so God sends signs. The oracle about the prince who would come to Babylon and never see it was fulfilled with terrible precision in King Zedekiah.

In chapter 13 we met the prophets who spoke from their own spirit and sold peace when there was no peace, whitewashing a flimsy wall so no one would ask the questions that lead to repair. We heard the same diagnosis from Ezekiel's contemporary in Jerusalem, and we heard Jesus pick up the whitewash image centuries later for religion that is beautiful outside and dead within. The lesson we drew: comfort was never the crime, counterfeit was, and true hope only works on the far side of the truth.

Chapter 14 gave us the session's discovery: elders came to consult God looking perfectly devout, and God said they had 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. Paul and Jesus read this as permanent: greed is idolatry, and what defiles comes from the heart. Even the righteousness of Noah, Daniel, and Job could not cover another person at this stage; each heart must hear 14:6 for itself: repent, and turn.

Voices of the Church

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.

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)

Ready Response

When someone who is suffering gets handed a quick religious comfort ('everything happens for a reason'), what could you offer instead?

'I don't know why this is happening. I'm not going anywhere.'

'This is hard. Can I pray with you rather than explain it?'

'God can handle your honesty. The psalms prove it.'

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 2113.** idolatry a constant temptation; divinizing power, pleasure, money
- **CCC 2114.** idolatry perverts our innate religious sense
- **CCC 2563.** the heart, our hidden centre, place of covenant
- **CCC 1431.** interior repentance, a radical reorientation of life

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 16 in one sitting before we meet. Fair warning: it is the rawest chapter in the book. Stay with it all the way to the end.

The LORD Is There

Session 6. The Foundling Bride

Everything the bride has is gift, and the marriage survives because the Husband keeps his vows.

What We Found

God tells Jerusalem her own story as a parable: an abandoned newborn he rescued, raised, and married. We listed his actions in verses 1 to 14 and noticed that the foundling contributes nothing but her need; even her famous beauty, verse 14 says, was perfect through the splendor he bestowed. The covenant does not begin with law or performance. It begins with rescue.

Verse 8 turns out to be a wedding, and we found that the other prophets speak the same way: the covenant at Sinai is an espousal, which the Church still teaches. That reframes sin. When the bride trusts in her beauty and spends every gift on idols, garments, gold, food, even the children, this is not rule-breaking. It is adultery against a rescuer, and the wounded party is God.

We faced the hard middle of the chapter honestly: the violent imagery is a figurative telling of the historical fall of Jerusalem, indicting Jerusalem as a whole, and heard first by a ruling establishment that was meant to feel exposed, and the chapter's destination is not disposal but restoration. We also read verse 49 and were surprised: the guilt God names first in Sodom is pride, plenty, prosperous ease, and neglect of the poor. Judgment is measured by light received, and that warning is aimed at religious insiders.

Then the ending. After fifty-nine verses of failure, every verb in verse 60 belongs to God: yet I will remember my covenant, I will establish an everlasting covenant. The marriage survives not because the bride was faithful but because the Husband is. And we found that the New Testament carries the picture forward: Christ the Bridegroom washes his bride, clothes her in splendor at his own expense, and calls the cup of the Last Supper the new covenant in his blood. The shame of verse 63 can be read gently: not the shame that hides from God, but the humbled silence of a person forgiven past all self-justification.

Voices of the Church

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.

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.

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

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 219.** God loves his people more than a bridegroom his beloved; his love is victorious over even the worst infidelities
- **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

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 18 before we meet again.

The LORD Is There

Session 7. The Soul That Sins

God bans the excuse, refuses the despair, and pleads with every soul: turn, and live.

What We Found

The exiles were quoting a proverb: the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. It sounded like theology, but it hid two lies at once, none of this is our fault, and nothing we do can matter. God banned it, and staked his claim over every one of us: behold, all souls are mine. No one relates to God only through their parents. Every soul stands before him directly.

We found that Ezekiel was standing on old ground. Deuteronomy 24:16 already forbade executing children for their fathers' sins, and Jeremiah, preaching in Jerusalem in the same period, banned the very same proverb and followed it with the promise of a new covenant written on hearts. Two prophets, two cities, one medicine.

Verses 21 to 24 broke the power of the past in both directions. The wicked man who turns will live, and his transgressions shall not be remembered against him. The righteous man who turns away cannot coast on his old record. Neither your worst chapter nor your best one is your destiny; God is watching the person you are turning into.

And twice, God opened his own heart. He takes no pleasure in the death of anyone. The chapter about judgment ends not with a gavel but with a plea: get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit; why will you die, O house of Israel? Turn, and live. Back in chapter 11 God promised to give that new heart himself. Tonight he commanded us to get one. Both are true, and the book has not yet told us how they meet. Keep watching.

Voices of the Church

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 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.

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

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 1847.** God created us without us, but he did not will to save us without us; mercy asks for our free response.
- **CCC 1037.** God predestines no one to hell, and the Church prays that no one be lost.
- **CCC 1430.** Real repentance is interior conversion of heart, not a fresh coat of outward religion.

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 20:1-44 before we meet again.

The LORD Is There

Session 8. For My Name's Sake

At every point where the story should have ended, God said: but I acted for the sake of my name.

What We Found

The elders came to Ezekiel wanting an oracle, and God refused, just as he had refused in chapter 14 while idols sat in hearts. Instead he retold Israel's whole history under oath, and it was darker than the version Israel told itself: idolatry already in Egypt, rebellion in the wilderness, twice over. And yet the story never ended, because of one refrain: but I acted for the sake of my name. The exodus itself was never a reward. It was mercy, anchored not in Israel's record but in God's own character and covenant.

We watched the exiles' secret plan surface, to assimilate and disappear among the nations, and we heard God's answer: a second exodus, announced in the very arm-and-hand language of the first, running through a new wilderness and a real judgment, and ending in accepted worship on God's holy mountain. The restored people grieve what they were, but only after they are home and held: contrition inside mercy, never shame instead of it. And the verse that gathers the whole night: you shall know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways.

Then the crown came off. The last king of David's line was stripped of turban and crown, and the throne of four centuries went empty: a ruin, a ruin, a ruin. But the sentence did not end in ruin. It ended with an until: until he comes whose right it is, and to him I will give it. We traced that line back to Jacob's deathbed blessing over Judah, the promise that the scepter waits for the one to whom it belongs, and forward to the angel's words to Mary, that God would give Jesus the throne of his father David and a kingdom without end. Exile did not cancel the promise. It cleared the stage for the heir.

Voices of the Church

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. The connection we made tonight is one 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.

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

Ready Response

When a friend says: a God who saves people to protect his own reputation sounds like an egotist.

For a creature, self-promotion is theft, because the glory belongs to someone else. God is the source of all good, so pointing us to himself and giving us our deepest good are the same act.

And look at what acting for his name's sake actually produced: rescue, three times over, for people who had earned none of it. In the covenant, God has tied his name to his people like a ring. His saving action for the sake of his name shows that his glory is not set against the good he intends for his people.

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 2811.** Israel profaned God's name among the nations, so the hope grew that God himself would hallow his own name by saving his people
- **CCC 122.** the Old Testament shows the true pedagogy of God, a patient father teaching over centuries
- **CCC 210-211.** God reveals the meaning of his name as mercy and fidelity, even to a sinful people
- **CCC 2008.** merit exists only because God freely chose to associate us with the work of his grace
- **CCC 2011.** the charity of Christ is the source of all our merits; the Catechism quotes St. Thérèse's offering here

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 24 and Ezekiel 33:1-33 before we meet again.

The LORD Is There

Session 9. The Delight of Your Eyes

The city fell exactly as the word said, the prophet's silent grief carried God's own, and the mouth that could only warn was opened for hope.

What We Found

We reached the hinge of the whole book. In chapter 24, God had Ezekiel write down the exact date the siege of Jerusalem began, seven hundred miles away, so that when the news finally arrived, everyone could check that God had spoken before the event. That same week Ezekiel lost his wife, the delight of his eyes, and his silent, restrained grief became a sign of a loss too great for mourning: the people were about to lose the delight of their eyes, the sanctuary itself. We did not pretend this chapter is easy. We found that Ezekiel's grief is Scripture's window onto God's own grief over his house, and that the answer finally big enough for it is the God who, in Christ, entered human suffering and death himself.

In chapter 33 the watchman charge from session 3 was renewed, and God swore by his own life that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, pleading turn back, turn back. Then, in 33:22, God opened Ezekiel's mouth the evening before the fugitive reached him with the news that the city had fallen; the long muteness ended: the opened mouth we have been tracking since session 3 was finally opened, because the message is about to change. And the chapter ended with a warning aimed straight at people like us: crowds who loved hearing the prophet like a beautiful song, were genuinely moved, and did nothing. Being stirred is not the same as being changed.

Voices of the Church

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 is 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. The Church's true norm for grief is Ambrose's: 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. The question is never whether the session was moving; it is whether Tuesday looked different because of it.

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)

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 1037.** God predestines no one to hell; he desires that all turn and live
- **CCC 1428.** conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church
- **CCC 1431.** interior repentance is a radical turning of the whole heart back to God
- **CCC 2611.** the prayer of faith means disposing the heart to do the Father's will, not only saying Lord, Lord

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 28:1-19 before we meet again, and skim chapters 25 to 27 if you can.

The LORD Is There

Session 10. The Pride of Tyre

The God of the exiles judges every nation, and the fall of Tyre's prince shows what pride does to any creature that says 'I am a god.'

What We Found

While Jerusalem was falling, God's word went out over the whole map: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Egypt. We found one repeating pattern, because of what you did, therefore judgment comes, then you will know that I am the LORD. No nation was judged for being foreign; every nation was judged for malice, gloating, or pride, by the same standard God had already applied to Israel. The exiles' God is not a defeated local god. He is the judge of the nations.

In the prince of Tyre we met the sin the tradition associates with the angelic fall, in its purest form. His wisdom was real and his wealth was real; the text concedes both. His sin was the sentence his heart spoke over his gifts: 'I am a god.' We traced that sentence back through Scripture and found it is the serpent's original promise, and the same 'I will make myself like the Most High' that toppled Babylon's king. Every fall is the same fall: a creature reaching for the Creator's chair. Pharaoh caught the same disease from the other side, looking at the river that made Egypt and saying, 'My Nile is my own; I made it.'

And we found the counter-sentence. All through this book God calls his prophet 'son of man,' mere mortal, and Ezekiel answers to it. The man who accepts being merely a man becomes God's spokesman; the man who calls himself a god is told, 'you are but a man, and no god.' Tucked between the judgment oracles we also found two verses of pure promise: God will gather his scattered people, they will dwell securely, and they will know that he is the LORD their God. Even in the judgment chapters, judgment is not the destination.

Voices of the Church

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.

For the group. The prince of Tyre is the earthly city compressed into a single man. Every heart is 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, 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 Tyre's prince could not bear to say became the source of Catherine's freedom and joy.

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

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 391-392.** the devil and the demons were created good and fell by their own free choice
- **CCC 1866.** pride is named among the capital sins
- **CCC 2113.** idolatry divinizes what is not God, including power and money
- **CCC 2559.** humility is the foundation of prayer

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 34 before we meet again.

The LORD Is There

Session 11. I Myself Will Shepherd Them

The shepherds failed the flock, so the Owner of the flock took the job himself.

What We Found

Ezekiel 34 opens with a firing. Israel's shepherds, her kings and leaders, fed themselves on the flock: they took the fat and the wool but never strengthened the weak, healed the sick, bound up the injured, brought back the strayed, or sought the lost, and the flock scattered into exile. God's verdict lands in verse 10: the sheep were always his, and he will require them at the shepherds' hand.

Then comes the takeover. In verses 11 to 16 God makes a dozen first person promises that answer the shepherds' failures point for point: I will search, seek, rescue, gather, feed, bind up, strengthen. He does not reform the system; he takes the job. 'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.' And we found where that promise goes: centuries later Jesus takes this chapter onto his own lips, calling himself the Good Shepherd of one flock, coming to seek and to save the lost, and sitting in judgment between sheep and sheep. Ezekiel says the shepherd who does those things is God himself. Jesus knew exactly what he was claiming.

The chapter holds one more surprise: alongside 'I myself will shepherd', God promises 'one shepherd, my servant David', though David had been dead for nearly four centuries. Both promises come true in one person: a son of David who is God come in person, who then hands the shepherd's work on to those he sends, measured forever by his own standard. The chapter closes with a covenant of peace and the words the whole book has been reaching for: you are my sheep, and I am your God. One question is still open, though. The flock is now safe. But how do the sheep themselves change on the inside? The book has not answered that yet.

Voices of the Church

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 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.

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

Go Further in the 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

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 36:16-38 before we meet again. And bring your curiosity: the sealed guesses you wrote back in session 1 are opened next session.

The LORD Is There

Session 12. A New Heart

God's answer to the heart of stone is not a demand but a transplant.

What We Found

The rescue in this chapter does not begin with Israel's suffering; it begins with God's name. The exile made the nations conclude that the LORD had failed his people, and God announces that he will act 'not for your sake ... but for the sake of my holy name's sake.' That stings for a moment, and then it liberates: a rescue anchored in God's own character is exactly as unbreakable as God, which is more than could ever be said of a rescue anchored in our performance.

Then came the transplant. We counted the verbs of verses 24-28 and found God the subject of nearly every one: I will take, gather, bring, sprinkle, cleanse, give, put, cause. In chapter 18 God commanded, get yourselves a new heart; tonight he promises, a new heart I will give you. What he commands, he gives. And we traced the promise forward into the New Testament, to a midnight conversation about being born of water and the Spirit, and to a line about hearts sprinkled clean and bodies washed: the Church has long heard verse 25 at the font, and appoints this passage among the readings of the Easter Vigil, the great night of baptisms.

And we opened the envelope. Eleven weeks ago we each guessed where God would choose to dwell by the end of this book, and tonight the text gave its most intimate answer so far: within you, by his own Spirit, in a heart of flesh. Some guesses hit that center. Others are still waiting, because the book is not finished, and we agreed to keep every guess open until the last night.

Voices of the Church

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.

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

Go Further in the 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

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 37 before we meet again.

The LORD Is There

Session 13. Can These Bones Live?

God asked a mortal man whether the hopeless dead can live, and answered with an army on its feet.

What We Found

God set Ezekiel down in a valley of bones that were very many and very dry, made him take honest inventory of the death, and then asked, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' Ezekiel's answer, 'O Lord GOD, thou knowest', is neither despair nor presumption; it hands the question back to the only one who can answer it. Then God made Ezekiel preach to a congregation of skeletons, and the word did what the word does: bone to bone, sinews, flesh, skin, and then, in a second movement, breath from the four winds, until the slain stood up, an exceedingly great host. Form without Spirit is still a corpse; the Spirit is what makes the difference between a reassembled people and a living one.

God interpreted his own vision: the bones are the whole house of Israel, saying 'our hope is lost.' He does not dispute their diagnosis; he disputes their conclusion. Hopelessness can be accurate about the situation and still wrong about God. The promise of 37:14 delivers exactly what last week's promise of a new heart was for: 'I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live.' And we traced how this hope ripened: a vision given first about a nation's restoration grew, within Scripture itself, into the full hope of the resurrection of the body, flowering in Christ.

Then the two sticks: Judah and Joseph, a kingdom broken in half for centuries, joined into one, not by negotiation but 'in my hand', under one shepherd-king called 'my servant David', promised four hundred years after David died. Resurrection and reunion are one work of the same God. And the chapter crested at the highest promise of the book so far: a covenant of peace that is an everlasting covenant, God's sanctuary in the midst of his people for evermore, his dwelling place with them. We followed that sentence all the way to the Bible's final pages, where it is still standing. The question this study has carried since night one, where will God finally choose to dwell, is nearly answered. Two sessions left.

Voices of the Church

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.

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

Go Further in the 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

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 38-39 before we meet again.

The LORD Is There

Session 14. The Enemy from the North

Between the resurrection of the bones and the coming of the temple, the book stages one last invasion, and God ends it without Israel lifting a sword.

What We Found

We started with placement rather than with Gog. Chapter 37 promised resurrection, reunion, an everlasting covenant and God dwelling with his people for ever; chapters 40 onward will show the temple and the river. Right between them, Ezekiel puts an attack. That is not clumsy editing. It is the answer to the question a rescued people always ask eventually, which is whether the peace will hold.

We tracked the verbs. God turns Gog about and puts hooks in his jaws and brings him up. God fights with earthquake, confusion, flooding rain, hailstones, fire. Israel's army never appears; the people are described as living in unwalled villages, without bars or gates. Their safety was never a function of their fortifications, which is the same thing the shepherd chapter told us weeks ago.

We took on the two strongest objections honestly. The popular one maps Gog onto modern nations by the sound of the words, which does not survive contact with the languages, and which Augustine was already warning readers off in the fifth century. The serious one says Ezekiel predicted a literal invasion that never came. We answered from genre and from the New Testament: the coalition is assembled from every compass point rather than from one border, and John himself takes Gog and Magog as the name for the last assault of all the nations, defeated by fire from heaven.

Then we found where the whole oracle was going. After the coalition and the hailstones and the seven months of burial, the last thing God says is this: I will not hide my face any more from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel. We put that beside Joel's promise of the Spirit poured out on all flesh and Peter standing up at Pentecost to say that this is that. The last enemy chapter in Ezekiel ends with an open face and a poured-out Spirit.

Voices of the Church

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. If someone sends you a video identifying Gog with a country on the news, this is your answer, and it is sixteen hundred years old.

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. He is equally insistent that the outcome is never in doubt, because the victory belongs to Christ.

Against Heresies, Book V (chapters 25-30). Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Real trial, limited time, certain outcome. That is the shape of Ezekiel 38 and 39, and it is the shape the Church still expects.

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. Ezekiel does not promise the restored people that nothing will come at them. He tells them who fights when it does.

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. The oracle ends with the nations knowing God, not with their annihilation.
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

Ready Response

Someone sends you a video: 'Ezekiel names Russia. The war in the news is in the Bible. This is the end.' What do you say?

The word behind 'Rosh' is the ordinary Hebrew word for chief, which is why our Bibles read 'chief prince'; the Moscow and Tobolsk connections are sound-alikes, and those cities are named far too late for it to work.

Augustine was already telling Christians not to pin these names on one nation in the fifth century. This is not a new caution.

What the Church actually teaches about the end is a shape and not a timetable: a final trial, and a victory that belongs to God rather than to any nation or army (CCC 675, 677).

And the oracle itself does not end with a battlefield. It ends with God saying he will never hide his face again.

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 675.** the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many
- **CCC 677.** the kingdom comes by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil
- **CCC 676.** the messianic hope cannot be realized within history, including in secularized forms
- **CCC 2853.** the victory over the prince of this world was won at the Cross

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 40:1-4 and 43:1-12 before we meet again.

The LORD Is There

Session 15. The Glory Comes Home

The glory that walked out came home by the same gate, and it did not stop at a building.

What We Found

Fourteen years after Jerusalem fell, Ezekiel was carried in vision to a very high mountain and shown a temple measured gate by gate and cubit by cubit. No one was ever told to build it, and no temple we know of was built to it; the exactness was the point. In this vision, God gives the measurements of a house he means to fill.

Then came the moment fifteen weeks of this study have been waiting for. We put the departure of the glory side by side with its return and found an exact reversal: the same glory, the same seer, the same east gate, walked in the opposite direction. The God who left in grief came back on purpose, and declared this the place of his throne, where he will dwell among his people for ever.

We asked what a never-built temple is pointing to, and let the strongest opposing reading have its say before answering. The New Testament gave us the destination: the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory; the true temple is the Lord's own body, then his Church built of living stones, then each of us, temples of the Holy Spirit, and at last a city that needs no temple because God himself dwells there.

We ended at a sealed door: the east gate to remain shut because the LORD had entered by it, with one mysterious prince permitted to eat bread before the LORD in its vestibule. The tradition saw in that sealed gate a quiet figure of Mary, the one gate by which the Lord entered the world. And we noticed the word the vision keeps repeating: for ever. The book has one sentence left to say about that. Next week we hear it.

Voices of the Church

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. When your world feels like it is coming apart, Gregory is proof this reading was forged under siege, not in comfort.

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 is how the Church reads the Old Testament 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 says out loud what we pieced together tonight: the returning glory finally landed in flesh, and then in you.

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

Ready Response

If a friend asks: 'If God is everywhere, why do Catholics make such a fuss about a tabernacle in a building?'

You are right that God is everywhere; Ezekiel saw his glory in Babylon, of all places. But the God who is everywhere also loves to be somewhere: a tent, a temple, and finally a human body.

Jesus called his own body the temple, and he chose to stay with us in the Eucharist. The tabernacle is not where we trap God; it is where he promised to wait for us.

Come sit in front of one with me sometime. It is easier to explain from a kneeler than from an argument.

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 586.** Jesus identifies himself with the temple, God's definitive dwelling among men
- **CCC 1197.** Christ the true temple; by grace, Christians become temples of the Holy Spirit
- **CCC 756.** the Church as God's building, his dwelling of living stones
- **CCC 117.** Scripture's spiritual senses: allegorical, moral, anagogical
- **CCC 499.** Mary, ever-virgin

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 47:1-12 and 48:30-35 before we meet again.

The LORD Is There

Session 16. The River and the Name

The book ends with a river that heals the deadest water on earth and a city with a new name: The LORD is there.

What We Found

Water begins as a trickle under the temple threshold and flows east, the direction the glory left by and came home by. Four measurements in, it is a river too deep to cross, and it never took on a single tributary: it deepens from its source alone. It heads straight for the Dead Sea, the deadest water in the land, and makes it fresh, with fishermen on the shore and trees on both banks bearing fruit every month, their leaves for healing, because the water flows from the sanctuary. It is Eden restored and exceeded.

We traced the river out of Ezekiel and into the New Testament with our own hands. In John's Gospel, Jesus stands up at the climax of the feast of Tabernacles and cries out that the thirsty should come to him and drink, and John tells us plainly what the living water is: the Holy Spirit. On the Bible's final page the river appears one last time, flowing not from a building but from the throne of God and of the Lamb, through a city that needs no temple because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. Ezekiel saw the river start under a threshold; John, read christologically, saw it start in a person; Revelation sees it start from a throne, forever.

And then the last verse of the whole book, where our study got its title. The city is not renamed for its walls, its people, or even its past. Its name henceforth is *YHWH-shammah*, The LORD is there. From a refugee camp in chapter 1 to this name in chapter 48, the whole story is God refusing to be defeated by our sin or by our ruins, because his purpose was never merely a building. It was communion with his people.

Voices of the Church

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.

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.
5. Sometime this week, reread Ezekiel 47:1-12 slowly, then go to Mass and watch what flows from the altar.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 48:35

"And the name of the city henceforth shall be, The LORD is there."

Ezekiel 48:35

Ready Response

If a friend asks what you got out of fourteen weeks in an Old Testament prophet, try answering in one breath:

God is not trapped in his buildings, and he is not defeated by our ruins.

He does not wait for better behaviour; he gives a new heart first, and the Spirit to go with it.

The whole story ends with a name, and the name is a promise: The LORD is there.

Go Further in the 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

Before next session. There is no next session; this line retires with the study.