

Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

Ezekiel: Presence from the Place of Exile

Ezekiel is a book about faith after collapse. A priest is cut off from the temple. A people are cut off from their land. What happens to prophecy, worship, and hope when the temple is gone? Ezekiel as a crisis text, not a neat theological system. Its difficulty is part of its witness.

I. Overview: Ezekiel Speaks after Collapse

- A. Ezekiel is not speaking from religious stability. He is a priest among the exiles in Babylon (near the River Chebar, **Ezek 1:1–3**).
- B. His ministry happens around Jerusalem's destruction in 586 BCE. The book's dates run roughly from 593 to 571 BCE.
- C. Ezekiel is speaking after disaster. The temple has failed. The monarchy has failed. The land has been lost. The question is: **what kind of faith can survive collapse?**
- D. The book's progression flows from Judgment on Jerusalem and Judah (**Ezek 1–24**), judgment on the nations (**Ezek 25–32**), and restoration after devastation (**Ezek 33–48**).

II. The Bizarre: Let it be bizarre (theophany).

- A. Alien-looking beings. In the fire are four living creatures. Each has four faces (human, lion, ox and eagle, **Ezek 1:10**) and four wings. Their legs are straight, their feet are like hooves, and they sparkle like burnished bronze (**Ezek 1:5–7**).
 - 1. Movement without turning. These beings do not move like humans. They move straight in any direction without turning their bodies (**Ezek 1:9, 12, 17**).
 - 2. Fire moving between the beings. Something like burning coals or torches flashes back and forth among them, with lightning coming out of the fire (**Ezek 1:13–14**). Ezekiel says the creatures themselves move like flashes of lightning.
 - 3. The wheels are the **UFO** part. Beside the creatures are wheels within wheels, "a wheel intersecting a wheel," gleaming like beryl or topaz. They move in any direction without turning, and their rims are high and terrifying, covered all around with eyes (**Ezek 1:15–18**).
 - 4. Levitation? The wheels move when the creatures move, rise when they rise, and stop when they stop, because "the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels" (**Ezek 1:19–21**). It is part chariot, part throne, part creature, part cosmic machine.
- B. The prophet's body also gets weird. Ezekiel eats a scroll (**Ezek 2:8–3:3**), lies on his side for symbolic days (**Ezek 4:4–8**), shaves his head and divides the hair as a sign of judgment (**Ezek 5:1–4**), and does not publicly mourn his wife (**Ezek 24:15–27**).

III. Contradictions and Difficulty: Refusing Easy Answers

- A. Ezekiel resists inherited generational punishment.

Eze. 18:19-20 ¹⁹Yet you say, "Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?" When the son has done what is lawful and right and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. ²⁰The person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child; the righteousness of the righteous shall be their own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be their own.

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Jeremiah 31:29–30 ²⁹ In those days they shall no longer say: “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” ³⁰ But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of the one who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.

Exodus 20:5 (also refer to Exo. 34:7; Num. 14:18).

I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation...

Deuteronomy 5:9 ⁹ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and fourth generation.

Deuteronomy 24:16 Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor children for their parents; each will die for their own sin.

B. Ezekiel condemns Child Sacrifice (**Ezek 16:20–21; 20:31; 23:37–39**) and Indicts Yahweh.

Ezek 20:25–26 ²⁵ Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live. ²⁶ I defiled them through their very gifts, in their offering up all their firstborn, in order that I might horrify them, so that they might know that I am the Lord.

C. Empire as judgment. Ezekiel treats Babylon as a divine instrument of judgment (**Ezek 21:18–27; 24:1–14**). That is dangerous language because it can make empire look divinely authorized.

1. Zedekiah’s dilemma. If Babylon is God’s “instrument” of judgment, why is Zedekiah aligning with foreign powers to fight Babylon? Ezekiel condemns Zedekiah’s appeal to Egypt (**Ezek 17:15–18**).
2. Valid Question: when people are trapped between empires, how should survival politics be judged?

D. Sexualized violence. Ezek. 16 and 23 use a marriage metaphor (images of an adulterous wife) as public shame for Jerusalem.

1. This violent imagery has been weaponized against women for generations.

IV. Marrying the Priestly and Prophetic: Holiness and Justice Together

- A. Ezekiel is both priest and prophet. He is introduced as a priest (**Ezek 1:3**), but he speaks, sees and critiques like a prophet.
1. Common contrast: Priestly religion often sounds legalistic, like purity culture, sacrifice, and order. Prophetic religion often sounds like justice, truth-telling, and critique. Ezekiel joins these together.
 2. In Ezekiel, holiness is not only about ritual order. It is also about whether **a community can resist corruption and violence**. After collapse, a community needs both critique and structure.

V. Hope: Presence Beyond the Temple

- A. Ezekiel’s hope begins after Jerusalem has fallen. It is not easy optimism; it is hope after loss (**Ezek 33:21–22**).

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1. **Divine Mobility.** The glory leaves the temple (**Ezek 10:18–19; 11:22–23**), but YHWH also promises to be “a sanctuary” for the exiles (**Ezek 11:16**). Sacred presence is no longer tied to place.
 2. New heart, new spirit and the removal of the heart of stone (**Ezek 11:19–20; 36:24–28; 37:23–28**).
 3. Ezekiel eats the scroll before he speaks (**Ezek 2:8–3:3**). The presence of God is not limited to a holy text. It is now embodied in Ezekiel.
- B. Dry bones. (**Ezek 37:1–14**) first speaks about a defeated people: “Our hope is lost.” The vision imagines communal life returning through breath, wind, and spirit.
- a. Form is not life. Breath is life.

Ezek. 37:5, 8-10 ⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause **breath** to enter you, and you shall live.

⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was **no breath in them**. ⁹Then he said to me, “Prophesy to **the breath**, prophesy, mortal, and say to **the breath**: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, **O breath**, and **breathe** upon these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the **breath came into them, and they lived** and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.
(refer also to **Gen 1:2; 2:7**).

C. Is the prophetic voice silenced when the prophet is not in the temple?

1. **Secular prophetic comparison:**

And I'd join the movement - If there was one I could believe in
Yeah I'd break bread and wine - If there was a church I could receive in
'Cause I need it now – **U2 “Acrobat”**

Bob Marley — “Get Up, Stand Up” A direct call to resist oppression rather than passively accept it.

Marvin Gaye — “What's Going On” A lament over war, social division, and human suffering.

Billie Holiday — “Strange Fruit” (1939) Protest of racist brutality.

Childish Gambino — “This Is America” (2018) American entertainment and consumerism as distractions from violence and suffering.

D. Ezekiel ends with water flowing from the temple, making dead waters fresh and trees fruitful (**Ezek 47:1–12**). Hope is not just return. Hope moves outward.

1. God is concerned with Israel, the environment, and the world.

Closing Takeaways

Lamentations ends with an unresolved plea: “Restore us to yourself, O LORD” (Lam. 5:21), followed by the troubling possibility that God has “utterly rejected us” (5:22).

Ezekiel ends with a vision of restored Jerusalem, a renewed temple, and restored presence of God among his people. Its final words are “**The LORD is there**” (*YHWH shammah*, Ezek. 48:35).

Choose your narrative. **Is God Jealous? Or about Justice?** Ezekiel allows us to decide.

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