

EZEKIEL

Death & Resurrection

Volume 1

Student Workbook

A BIBLE STUDY BY JOHN N. OSWALT

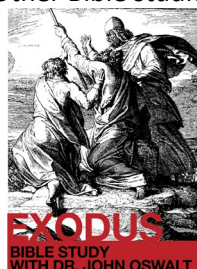


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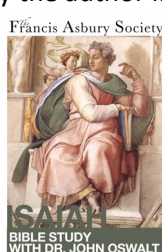
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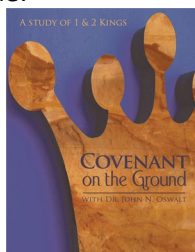
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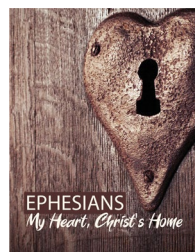
Exodus



Isaiah



*Covenant on the
Ground: 1 & 2 Kings*



*Ephesians: My
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION & EZEKIEL 1	5
EZEKIEL 2–3.....	9
EZEKIEL 4–5.....	11
EZEKIEL 6–7.....	13
EZEKIEL 8–9.....	15
EZEKIEL 10–11.....	17



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A Bible Study with John Oswalt

INTRODUCTION & EZEKIEL 1

Historical Background

The century between 630 and 530 BC was one of the most tumultuous ever until the twentieth-century AD.

- In 630 BC Assyria was the mightiest empire on earth. By 609, it ceased to exist, destroyed by a coalition between Assyria's old vassal, Babylon, and the warlike Medes from what is today northwest Iran.
- Assyria's conquests were largely taken over by Babylon under the strongman, Nebuchadnezzar. He ruled from 605 BC until 562 BC and created Daniel's golden empire. But it was a one-man show and when Nebuchadnezzar died, there was no one in Babylon really able to replace him.
- Meanwhile, the Medes had "changed horses" and allied themselves with the rising star of Persia, in the southwest of Iran. Already in the late 550s the Persians, under their king Cyrus, were stripping Babylon of her possessions to the North along the Euphrates. In 539, they took the city itself and inaugurated the Persian empire.

So, in a matter of some 80 years three different empires held the stage for some period of time. Judah could not escape being caught up in all this upheaval.

- Josiah was on the throne during the 20 or so years when Assyria was being destroyed. He was killed by the Egyptians possibly because he was trying to prevent the Egyptians from helping the Assyrians.
- Josiah was succeeded by no fewer than three sons and one grandson in the space of 25 years.
 - At first, between 609 and 605, the Judeans attached themselves to Egypt. But that was a bad choice because Egypt could not stand up to Babylon, and so in 605 the Judeans bowed to the inevitable and surrendered to Babylon. At that time the Babylonians took hostages, among whom were Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
 - Then in 601 Jehoiakim took the opportunity of a Babylonian defeat at the hands of Egypt to rebel against Babylon. Bad choice! Babylon quickly recouped its losses and came back from refitting to besiege Jerusalem.
 - Jehoiakim died of unknown causes during the siege and was replaced by his teenaged son, Jehoiachin, who promptly surrendered in 598. The royal family was taken into captivity along with many others, including a young priest-in-training named Ezekiel.
 - The Babylonians put yet a third son of Josiah on the throne. This man's throne name was Zedekiah. He seems to have ruled primarily by poll, and when he found out that the leadership wanted him to revolt, he did so, with tragic results. When the Babylonians finally conquered the city in 586 BC, they thoroughly destroyed it and carried off the rest of the leadership.

The Assyrians and the Babylonians after them had practiced the policy of exile, removing the leadership from a captured territory and replacing them with exiles from somewhere else in the empire.

- This policy had been carried on for some 800 years. To be taken into captivity was to disappear as a nation and culture. No one returned.
- Remarkably, the Persians (as predicted by Isaiah) had overturned this policy, inviting any exiles who wished to return to their land to do so and promising to pay for the rebuilding of their temple.

Background to Ezekiel

As mentioned above, Ezekiel was carried off in the second exile in 598. The reference to “the thirtieth year” in 1:1 is almost certainly a reference to Ezekiel’s thirtieth year. According to the second verse, this was “the fifth year of Jehoiachin’s exile,” which would have been 593. Thus, Ezekiel would have been twenty-five when taken. Priests began their service in their 30th year.

From 593 until 586, Ezekiel’s message contained in chapters 4–24 was that Judah and Jerusalem would fall to the Babylonians. This message was roundly rejected. Such a thing could not possibly happen. Jerusalem was protected by Yahweh who could not possibly be defeated by the pagans from Babylon. The exiles would shortly be returning home. Chapter 24 ends with the report that the siege had begun.

After Jerusalem did fall, as reported in chapter 33, Ezekiel’s message underwent a dramatic change: Jerusalem would be rebuilt and the exiles would return home. This message too was rejected. No, the promises had failed, Yahweh had been defeated, and all was lost. There was no hope, and the exiles might as well settle down and become good Babylonians.

Between these two sections, chapters 25–32 contain a series of judgments pronounced on the nations that the besieged Judeans might have looked to for help. All will fall, says Yahweh.

The book’s conclusion with the plans for a rebuilt Temple is very much like the end of the book of Exodus. This helps us to recognize Ezekiel’s perspective on Israel’s history: it has been one huge Judges cycle, rolling from blessing to complacency to disobedience to punishment to crying out to deliverance to restoration. The return from exile will be to start over again from the exodus. Note the repeated phrases from Exodus: then you will know that I am Yahweh; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

While many have taken the temple plans to refer to a literal future temple, there is the distinct possibility that they are intended to be a metaphor for the people of God, in whom he intends to dwell.

The last reference to time is found in Ezekiel 29:17. This is to the year 571 BC by which time Ezekiel would have been 52. How much of his work is later than this we do not know.

Many scholars believe that this is the first, and one of the few, prophetic books that contain large sections that were written down from the outset. It is thought, probably correctly, that most of the books are composed of transcripts of short prophetic utterances (represented by a few verses) which have been collected and then arranged in a purposeful way. Here, large sections, consisting of a chapter or more, seem to show a developed argument.

Outline

- I. Introduction
 - A. Commissioning (Ezek. 1–3)
 - B. The End Has Come (Ezek. 4–7)
 - C. Filthy temple abandoned (Ezek. 8–11)
- II. The Certainty of the Destruction of Judah and Jerusalem (Ezek. 12–24)
- III. Oracles against the Nations (Ezek. 25–32)
- IV. The Certainty of the Restoration of Judah and Jerusalem (Ezek. 33–48)
 - A. Messages of Hope (Ezek. 33–39)
 - B. A New Temple (Ezek. 40:1–47:12)
 - 1. A Perfect Structure (Ezek. 40:1–43:17)
 - 2. A Perfect Worship (Ezek. 43:18–47:12)
 - C. A New Land (Ezek. 47:13–48:35)

Ezekiel 1

Background: Once Ezekiel had been taken out of the holy land, he was irretrievably defiled and could not ever serve as a priest.

The Kebar (or Chebar) River was a canal in southern Mesopotamia connecting the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. This is where the Judeans seem to have been exiled as a group. (The Israelites from the northern kingdom seem to have been scattered in several locations.)

1. What is the significance of this vision occurring in Ezekiel's thirtieth year? (See the introduction above.)
2. Why do you think this amazing vision was given to Ezekiel? What might he have been feeling about Yahweh's presence and his location at this time?
3. While it is impossible to determine the symbolic significance of all the details of the vision, we can see the theological implications. So, think about the following:
 - a. Notice the explanation of each of the four faces facing a different direction and of the intersecting wheels (vv. 5, 12, 17). What does this say to us about God's Spirit?

- b. What do the four faces represent?
 - c. Notice the repeated word in verses 4, 13, 14, and 27. What is the significance of this image in this context?
 - d. Notice the recurrence of “likeness of” (vv. 5, 13, 22, 26, 28) and notice where the phrase appears. What do you think Ezekiel is trying to say?
 - e. What is the relationship among the living creatures, the expanse (or surface, or platform), and the throne?
 - f. What is the significance of God’s giving this amazing vision to Ezekiel in Babylon?
4. Summarize some of the great theological themes that are taught through this vision.



EZEKIEL: *Death and Resurrection*

A Bible Study with John Oswalt

EZEKIEL 2–3

1. What is the culmination of the vision according to verse 1:28? What is the significance of this?
2. Connect the reference to the Spirit in verse 2:2 with the references in chapter 1. (See also 3:12 and 14).
3. How many times are forms of the word “rebel” repeated in this chapter? Why is this?
4. What is the purpose of Ezekiel’s commissioning?
5. What is the significance of Ezekiel’s being asked to eat the scroll (Ezek. 2:8–3:3)?
6. How do you put together the scroll being sweet in Ezekiel’s mouth (3:3) with “bitterness in the heat of my spirit” (3:14), especially in view of his apparent silence for seven days (3:15)?
7. According to verses 3:16–21 what was Ezekiel’s role to be? When is the watchman successful? How is this different from the role of a pastor (shepherd)?
8. What is the significance of the symbolism described in verses 3:22–27?

9. Notice the prominence of words and speech in these two chapters. What are your reflections?



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EZEKIEL 4–5

Background: There is a sense in which chapters 4–11 form a unit (after the commissioning in chapter 1–3). They establish the point that Jerusalem will be destroyed, and that the destruction definitely will occur because far from having a holy temple there to protect them, the temple is hopelessly corrupt, as are its worshippers.

- 390 days would correspond to the time span between the death of Solomon (930 BC), when the northern kingdom, Israel, was formed, and the return from Babylon in approximately 540 BC. This suggests (especially in view of the 40 days assigned to Judah (586–536 BC), that God viewed the entire existence of the northern kingdom as captivity away from Jerusalem.
 - The term translated “judgments” (KJV), “ordinances” (NASB, NRSV), “rules” (ESV), or “regulations” (NLT) is one we have talked about in other studies. It comes from the idea of “order” (as opposed to “chaos”) with uses ranging from patterns to customs to practices to agreed-upon standards to expected behaviors to punishments inflicted for infringing on those expected behaviors.
 - An “abomination” (5:9, 11) is something contrary to the created order. For instance, an idol is an abomination, because creatures were never meant to be worshipped. Likewise, a father eating a son (5:10) would be an abomination. Abominations result in more abominations.
 - In Ezekiel 5:13 we have the first of some 50 “Then you will know that I am Yahweh” statements in the book of Ezekiel, reminiscent of that same recurring statement in the book of Exodus. Since they had not learned it through deliverance, they were going to have to learn it through judgement.
1. How many different “acted-out parables” do you find in chapters 3 and 4? What are they? What is their significance according to Ezekiel 3:3? What is the significance of that term considering the Exodus?
 2. Notice that verses 4, 5, and 6 tell us this lying on his side was not merely a demonstration. What is this pointing to?
 3. Imagine Ezekiel’s anguish over what the third sign entailed. Why would God do this to an especially called servant? Can you think of another prophet who was called to do something frankly immoral? What is God doing?

4. In some ways the fourth sign was the most degrading of all, because it deprived Ezekiel of his status as a respected man. Of all of them it is most nearly a parable because it will be explained in the following verses. (See 5:11–12)
5. What is implied by “set her among the nations” (5:5)? Instead, what has Jerusalem done? In fact, according to verse 7, what more have they done? What does all this say to the church?
6. As a result, what terrible thing has happened (according to v. 8)? What is the necessary result of that, according to verses 9–10?
7. If we believe that Yahweh is good, gracious, and forgiving, how are we to explain the intensity of fury and rage that we see in verses 13–17?
8. How are verses 14–15 the mirror image of verse 5? What do they tell us about the order and symmetry of God’s universe?



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EZEKIEL 6–7

Background: Worship centers were often found on mountaintops, perhaps because one was thought to be closer to the gods there. Thus, because of the principle of continuity, if some place was a consecrated worship center it was a mountain top, a “high place.”

An “abomination” (Heb. *to‘eba*, something abhorrent) is anything contrary to the order of nature. Ezekiel conveys this sense of abhorrence with his almost exclusive use (some 60 times, only 9 times elsewhere) of a particular term for “idol” appearing here first in Ezekiel 6:4. It is the word *gillulim*. It seems to come from a root meaning “round,” and almost certainly it refers to the round things left in the road after a herd of animals pass by. Probably the best English equivalent is the Anglo-Saxon “turd.” This is the more shocking in a usually literarily elegant writing.

“Know that I am Yahweh” appears some ten times between Exodus 7 and 14. There, it is the delivering power of Yahweh that produced that result.

1. What was Judah being judged for in chapter 5? Now what are they being judged for in chapters 6 and 7? Why that order, do you think?
2. How many times does some form of “abomination” appear in the two chapters? See the background above. Why should an idol be seen as an abomination?
3. Count the number of times that some version of “know that I am Yahweh [the Lord]” appears in these two chapters. What are the circumstances in each case that produce this knowledge? Why do you think it is repeated so many times? Note the background above. How might the people, with Jerusalem under threat, have been using the phrase? How does this apply to us?
4. Why is God so violently opposed to idol worship? Is it jealousy for his own prerogatives, concern for us, or what? What’s the problem? How does that translate into today?

5. Ezekiel 6:10 speaks of one of the purposes of predictive prophecy. What is it? (Look at Lev 26:30.)
6. The English “I will punish you according to your ways” (7:4, 9) translates a terser Hebrew, “I will put on you according to your ways.” A slangy translation might be, “I will give you what you’ve got coming to you.” How does this way of expressing the concept give a slightly different sense than the English? See also Ezekiel 7:27.
7. In many ways Ezekiel 7:10 is a good topic sentence for verses 10–22. What has budded, and what has it blossomed into? (Think about Aaron’s rod, Num. 17:3–10.) What are people depending on for their deliverance (cf. vv. 19–22)? How do these ideas capsule the human problem?



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EZEKIEL 8–9

Background: The vision that begins in chapter 8 carries on through chapter 11. As stated in earlier lessons, the vision establishes the thorough corruption of the Jerusalem temple. Notice the similarity between Manasseh's sins as described in 2 Kings 21:4–7 and those described here. Josiah had cleansed the temple, but it looks as if Josiah's sons brought it all back.

- It is probable that the image of jealousy (Ezek. 8:3, 5) is that of Asherah, one of the Canaanite fertility goddesses. See 2 Kings 21:7 and 23:6.
 - Tammuz was a Mesopotamian god of vegetation. When he died in the Fall, women would weep so that he would know he was loved and would come back in the Spring.
 - When Ezekiel refers to the “remnant” (9:8), he is thinking of the people left in Jerusalem after the deportations of 605 and 598.
1. Notice the date and compare it to Ezekiel 1:1. How much time has elapsed? What might this suggest about the timing of the instructions in chapter 4? What are your observations?
 2. Compare the description in Ezekiel 8:2 with that in 1:27. What are your conclusions?
 3. Note that Ezekiel is being taken deeper into the temple complex, from the gate to the outer courtyard, through the wall into the inner courtyard, and finally to the temple building itself. What would what is described in verses 7–13 be comparable to today? Why is sexual activity so fascinating and obsessive to us?
 4. How does the attitude “the Lord has forsaken his land” relate to the Christian who falls into habitual sin?
 5. What kinds of things happen in a church where its leaders are overtaken by hidden sins (not merely sexual ones)?

6. In what ways are what is described in Ezekiel 8:16 a reversal of what should have been happening?
7. Explain how the things described here could have happened in the very house of Yahweh?
8. Notice Ezekiel 8:17. What is the connection between worship of the world and violence?
9. What significance do you see in the direction from which the six men came in Ezekiel 9:2?
10. What was the behavior that procured amnesty for some people? What is the significance of such behavior?
11. What do you make of the references to “the glory of the Lord” and his movements in these chapters?



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EZEKIEL 10–11

Background: The situation in chapter 11 is complicated. Presumably Ezekiel is physically in Babylon, but his vision is in Jerusalem in the temple. In his vision he sees men he recognizes; they are leaders who have replaced those carried off in 598. Then he is instructed to prophesy, presumably to the exiles in Babylon (vv. 7–12). They are permitted to hear what God has to say about those leaders because it has relevance for the exiles in Babylon.

It is difficult to make sense of Ezekiel 11:3. Is it saying the time is, or is not, near for the building of houses? The versions demonstrate this uncertainty. The most recent thinking is that the second option is correct. The point would be that the people need not worry about rebuilding their houses because the leaders will take care of everything.

1. How is the vision that we first encountered in chapter 1 being used here? How is its function different here from there?
2. Where are the cherubim standing when the sequence starts (Ezek. 10:3)? What happens next (Ezek. 10:4)?

What do you think is the significance of this? Look up Exodus 40:34–35; 2 Chronicles 7:1–3.

3. What is the difference between the cherubim over the ark of the covenant and these cherubim? What is the significance of the difference?
4. What is Ezekiel 10:18 telling us about Yahweh's developing relationship to the temple?
5. Presumably, the bad advice (v. 2) is that Jerusalem is like a sealed storage pot and that those in it are entirely secure. Why is it bad advice?

6. In fact, says Yahweh, Jerusalem is a cooking pot full of the results of your corrupt, oppressive leadership (see Micah 3:1–3 for a fuller statement). So what will be the result? What is the message to the exiles?
7. Compare Ezekiel 9:8 and 11:13. What does this tell us about the heart of the prophet? How does God answer him?
8. What are the people in Jerusalem saying, but what is the truth? What will characterize the faithful remnant when they return (vv. 18–20).
9. What do verses 22–24 tell us?
10. How would you sum up the message of these two chapters for us today?



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