

Goals

In this unit, students will learn about the captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem, and how the Israelites had learned a very harsh and difficult lesson. God's abidance did not lie in the structural temple but rather in meeting the exact standards and holiness of God. In the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the people had returned from captivity. Their goal now was to rebuild the temple, the city walls and revive their faith. Just as how the Israelites returned to build the physical temple, our students will learn that we need to build the spiritual temple of God; the church and our own faith. To do this, we rely not on might, nor power, but on the Holy Spirit.

unit
3**Teacher Devotional**

In the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes, Calvin, a six year old boy and his toy tiger Hobbes, which comes alive in Calvin's imagination, decide to build a model of a phantom jet. Eager to have it finished, Calvin decides that it's easier to improvise on his own than figuring out the complicated instructions. When he has finished, he looks at his model and is upset because his plane doesn't look anything like the picture on the box. Similarly, when we build the spiritual temple of God, we need to be careful on how we build it. We need to read God's instruction manual carefully and to follow the directions precisely. There is no room for us to improvise or deviate. Only then can we experience the glory of the Lord and have His abidance.

Building the Temple of God

*"You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."
(1 Pet 2:5)*

Lesson 9

Ezekiel (1)

Listed Scriptures

Ezek 1-3, 18

Lesson Aim

- 1) Students will learn of the reasons for the Israelites' captivity.
- 2) Students will realize that without holiness, no one can see God.
- 3) Students will gain a better understanding of God's discipline.

Memory Verse

"Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God." (Ezek 11:19-20)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Ezek 1-3, 18

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D

**The Glory of God**

The word glory is a significant one in the Old Testament and the glory of God is a major theme in the book of Ezekiel. The Hebrew word, Kabod, comes from a root that means "heavy" or "weighty." It suggests what is impressive or worthy about a person or thing. The term is often associated, in ancient cultures, with kings who possessed both high position and great wealth. In the Old Testament the phrase, "the glory" or "the glory of God" is closely linked with God's revelation of Himself. It is the manifestation of God's character – His ultimate power, transcendence, and moral perfection.



The Oyster

There once was an oyster
Whose story I tell,
Who found that some sand
Had got into his shell.
It was only a grain,
But it gave him great pain.
For oysters have feelings
Although they're so plain.

Now, did he berate
The harsh workings of fate
That had brought him
To such a deplorable state?
Did he curse at the government,
Cry for election,
And claim that the sea should
Have given him protection?

No – he said to himself
As he lay on a shell,
Since I cannot remove it,
I shall try to improve it.
Now the years have rolled around,
As the years always do,
And he came to his ultimate
Destiny – stew.

And the small grain of sand
That had bothered him so
Was a beautiful pearl
All richly aglow.
Now the tale has a moral;
For isn't it grand
What an oyster can do
With a morsel of sand?

What couldn't we do

If we'd only begin
With some of the things
That get under our skin.

What are some of the things that God has used in your life
to refine you?



Part 1

General Overview



A. Author

The author of this book was Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, a Zadokite priest. The meaning of Ezekiel's name is "God will strengthen." At the time of the second Babylonian invasion of Judah (597 B.C.), 25 year-old Ezekiel was taken to Babylon along with King Jehoiachin and 10,000 other captives. The nation was on the brink of complete destruction. Five years after being deported God called Ezekiel to be a prophet at the age of 30. Ezekiel had a unique two-part ministry. Between 592-586 B.C., Ezekiel's messages contained warnings about Jerusalem's destruction before its final destruction in 586 B.C. For the 15 years after that, Ezekiel was silent. Then, in 571 B.C. the prophet took up a new ministry. His message now was one of hope, promise, and comfort for the exiles.

Two of Ezekiel's contemporaries were Jeremiah and Daniel. When Ezekiel was called to be a prophet, Jeremiah was advanced in age and approaching the end of his prophetic career. God thus raised a prophet from among the exiles to continue in the work. While Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem just before the imminent destruction, Ezekiel worked among the captives already in Babylon, by the River Chebar - a tributary of the River Euphrates. Meanwhile, the prophet Daniel had been taken captive eight years before Ezekiel and was serving the king in the royal palace in Babylon.

B. Date

Ezekiel was carried off to exile in Babylon after the city fell a second time to Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. His first vision dated around 593-92 BC and the date given for his last oracle is probably around 571-70 B.C. This book is the easiest of the Old Testament books to date because of Ezekiel's unique orderly sequence of dates. Each section of prophetic oracles begins with the year and day of the month.



Part 2

The Calling of Ezekiel

While Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem about the imminent destruction of the city to the Babylonians, Ezekiel was called by God to declare the exact same message to the captives who were taken to Babylon during the first deportation. Like those in Jerusalem, the captives refused to believe that Jerusalem would fall. They were convinced that they would return to their land soon. Ezekiel warned them that because of their stubbornness, punishment was certain and that God was to use the captivity to purify His people. Through visions, Ezekiel received a personal vision of the unchangeable holiness of God and his commission to be a prophet and watchman of Israel.

A. The Vision of the Four Living Creatures

a. The faces of the four living creatures

In this first vision, Ezekiel sees four living creatures, each having the face of a man, lion, ox and eagle. These four faces symbolize God's perfect nature and the attributes a servant of God and a true believer should possess.

The face of a man: Man is superior of all living creatures and created after the image of the living God, filled with righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). As servants of God, we need to imitate the likeness of our Lord Jesus who is full of holiness, compassion, and humility.

The face of a lion : The lion is the king of beasts and is a majestic, bold and

powerful animal. As servants of God we need to have the courage to eliminate sin and to preach the word of God fearlessly.

The face of an ox : Oxens are animals known for their strength, hard work and willingness to serve. When we serve God let us imitate the diligence, strength, patience, long-suffering and humility of the oxen (Prov 14:4).

The face of an eagle: Eagles are considered to be the most superior of all birds. They fly to majestic heights transcending mountains and earth. Their eyes are sharp and piercing. As servants of God we need to rise above the world and look to matters above. We should have the spiritual knowledge to discern all things and to know what is the good and perfect will of God. Furthermore, we need to carry the word of God afar to the four corners of the earth.

b. They had four wings (Ezek 1:6,11)

The four living creatures each had four wings; two wings touched the wings of others, while two covered their bodies. When we do holy work, we need to stay connected with each other and be united in our service. Unity and teamwork is the secret for executing the work of God effectively. The two wings that covered the body remind us to serve God unobtrusively and to give glory to God in all things.

c. Under their wings they had four hands (Ezek 1:8)

The hands beneath the wings symbolize how God's work is humbly carried out by man.

d. Their legs were straight and they had the sole of a calf's foot (Ezek 1:7)

As servants of God we need to be committed to walking on the right path. Our feet cannot stray to the left or to the right.

B. The Vision of the Four Wheels

Beside the four living creatures were four wheels. The four wheels represent the continuous and unceasing motion of the gospel and God's power. The wheels move with order and regularity. Similarly the entire universe and the history of mankind are all governed by the invisible power of God.

a. A wheel within a wheel (Ezek 1:16)

The wheel within a wheel depicts two wheels, one facing north-south and the other facing east-west, demonstrating the ability to move anywhere. God is omnipresent and there is nothing that can hinder or restrict Him.

b. The spirit of the creatures were in the wheels (Ezek 1:19-20)

Wherever the wheels went, the creatures went also. God's spirit guided and governed the movements of the four living creatures. As servants of God we need to totally submit to the Holy Spirit's direction.

c. The wheels were full of eyes (Ezek 1:18)

This represents God's wisdom and omniscience. God's eyes are in every place, keeping watch over the good and the evil (Prov 15:3), therefore let us be faithful in our service to Him.



C. The Vision of the Glory of God

Appearing over the heads of the four living creatures was a firmament and above the firmament, the Son of Man was seated upon a throne. His body shone like bronze and all around was the appearance of a bow. The throne was the glorious throne of God: the throne of mercy, of authority, and of judgment. This throne appeared to the captives in Babylon and suggests that God's wrath and judgment was but for a moment. His grace and love will abide with His people, even in captivity. The rainbow over the throne assures the people of God's never-ending faithfulness towards His chosen ones.



Part 3

The Prophecies Concerning the Destruction of Jerusalem

Using visions, parables, allegories, and symbolic action, God pronounces judgment upon His people. The judgments of God were as follows:



A. Each person will be judged according to his or her deeds (14:14; 18:11, 22, 30)

During the time of Ezekiel, a proverb was circulating among the people: "The

fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek 18:2). When the people were first deported to Babylon in 597 B.C., some of them believed that they were being unjustly punished for the sins of their forefathers. Here Ezekiel flatly refutes that misconception. He reminds the people of Judah that they were punished for their own rebelliousness. Although we often suffer from the effects of sins committed by those who came before us, God does not punish us for someone else's sins; and we cannot use their mistakes as an excuse for our sins. The people also thought that they would live and escape punishment because of their righteous ancestors (18:5-9). Taking Noah, Daniel and Job as examples of righteous men, the Lord said that on the day of judgment, the righteousness of these men cannot be used to cover up anyone's evil or wicked deeds. Our salvation is between God and us alone. The righteous deeds of our parents, siblings or any other person will only save themselves. We need to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).



B. God would send His people to exile (Ezek 12:1-20; 17:1-21)

It was not enough to just use words to warn the rebellious house of Judah of God's wrath. God asked Ezekiel to perform unusual actions to graphically portray the fate of Jerusalem to a people whose heart, eyes and ears were dulled by sin.

- a. Using a brick, a map of Jerusalem, and an iron plate, Ezekiel enacted the coming siege and fall of Jerusalem (Ezek 4:1ff).
- b. Ezekiel was instructed to lay on his left side for 390 days and 40 days on his right side to show Israel the years of punishment that will befall Israel and Judah (Ezek 4:4-6).
- c. The prophet followed specific cooking instructions (4:9-17). The amount of food he was allowed to eat was the normal ration provided to those living in a city under siege by enemy armies. The food cooked over cow dung was a symbol of Judah's spiritual uncleanness and Ezekiel's restricted movement illustrates how the people of Jerusalem would be imprisoned within the walls of the city.
- d. Ezekiel was directed to shave his head and beard, and then to divide the hair into three parts (Ezek 5:1-4). This represents how the Israelites would die of famine, pestilence, and the sword.

- e. God asked Ezekiel to prepare an exile's baggage, eat bread with quaking and drink water with trembling and fear because the Lord would send His people into exile. This sign was fulfilled 5 years later - the Babylonians invaded the city for a final time and the last king of Judah joined the exiles already in Babylon (Ezek 12:2-7; Jer 52:7).
- f. Ezekiel sang a death dirge to show Judah that there was no hope for a quick return from exile and no escape from the approaching Babylonian armies (Ezek 19:1ff).
- g. In the parable of the cooking pot (Ezek 24:1-14), Ezekiel was to put some choice meat in a pot and boil it well in the fire. The people in Judah thought they were the choice meat because they had not been taken into captivity in 597 B.C. when the Babylonians last invaded the land. Ezekiel used this illustration to show that though the people thought they were safe and secure inside the pot, this pot would actually be the place of their destruction. This message was given to the exiles in Babylon the very day the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem, beginning a siege that lasted over 2 years and resulted in the city's destruction.
- h. God instructed Ezekiel that He was going to take away his wife, but the prophet was not allowed to mourn, bare his head or feet, or accept the food brought to him (Ezek 24:20-24). Ezekiel showed his fellow exiles that this would be the scene when Jerusalem is besieged.

C. God's glory departs from Jerusalem

The glory of God is the manifestation of God's divine nature and represents the abidance of God. If we trace the history of the Israelites, the glory of God had always been with His chosen people.

- a. When the Israelites departed from Egypt, God's glory could be seen in the pillar of cloud and fire which directed the people through the wilderness.
- b. The beginning of the temple began with the tent of meeting at the time of Moses (Ex 40). After the tent of meeting had been built, the glory of the Lord filled it and was so great that not even Moses could enter it.
- c. After the tabernacle was built, God's presence and glory filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35).
- d. At the dedication of Solomon's temple, God also filled the temple with His glory (2 Chron 7:1-2) so that the priests could not enter.

But when Israel turned from God, persisted in sin and profaned the temple with idols and wickedness, God departed from the temple and His people. Although the opening chapters of the book of Ezekiel describe the splendor of God's glory, chapters 8-11 graphically present the glory of God departing from the temple step by step:

- a. The glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherubim on which it rested to the threshold of the house (9:3; 10:4). He left the cherubim, guarding the mercy seat.
- b. The glory of the Lord went from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim (10:18).
- c. The glory of God mounted up from the earth and stood at the door of the east gate of the house of the Lord (10:19)
- d. The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city (Mt of Olives) (11:22-23).
- e. The glory of the Lord left the temple, the holy city and the earth (11:24).

God was reluctant to leave His people. His heart was still with them and He hoped that the people would change. But they didn't. And so God left Jerusalem and abandoned His altars, temple and people. From chapters 12 to 42, there is not a single reference to the glory of God. The glory of God would only return when the Israelites had received the full punishment from God and were cleansed. This occurs in chapter 43 onwards when the glory of God reappears instantaneously and in full splendor. Today, the temple of God is the body of believers. In order to have the abidance of God, we need to strive for holiness and keep His commands.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1 What can we learn about servitude from the vision of the four living creatures?

2 What is the glory of God?

3 Reflect on the glory of God in the history of the Israelites.

4 What lessons can we learn from the departure of God's glory from Jerusalem?

5 Why were verbal messages not sufficient – why did God ask Ezekiel to perform symbolic actions also?

6 What are some of the symbolic actions that Ezekiel performed?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



The Lord's Pruning

Just as a farmer uses various methods to ensure that his fruit trees bear abundant fruits, our Heavenly Father too uses different ways and means to bring His children back when they stray so that they might bear good fruits.

1. My view on discipline
(students' response)
2. God's view on discipline
God's discipline is never out of vengeance or with evil intent. It is a sign of His love (Rev 3:19; Jer 31:20; Heb 12:6).
As a means of receiving benefit (Heb 12:10; Is 48:17)
To help us discern the right way (Ps 31:8; 119:67, 71, 75)
To gain peace and eternal life (Is 38:17; 54:13; Prov 23:14; 19:18)
To help us change so that we strive for holiness (Prov 3:19; Heb 12:10)
To bear good fruit (Heb 12:11-12; Ps 119:67)
3. In the first tree, list some of the things a farmer might do to improve the size, quality, and productivity of his fruit trees.

What a farmer does:

Apply water – apply the right amount at the right time

Apply fertilizers – to give the plant nutrition

Remove damaged or malformed fruit

Prune – cuts off older branches to produce new growth

Remove broken limbs, dead or diseased wood

Thinning – remove immature fruit which will improve size and quality of fruit

Control the direction of tree growth – to enable proper shape to develop

4. In the next tree, list the ways our Heavenly Father would prune and discipline us so that we can bear fruits of righteousness.

What God does:

Through Holy Spirit (Jn 16:7-8; Eph 4:30; Jer 20:8-9; Ac 2:37)

Through the words of God (2 Tim 3:16; Ps 118:17)

Through God's servant or the people around us (Tit 1:3; Heb 1:1; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 2:24-26; Prov 27:5)

Visions and dreams (Job 33:14-18; Gen 31:24)

Through creation (Rom 1:20; Heb 3:4)

Through punishment/disasters (Job 36:15-16; Jer 18:11)

5. Share an experience where you were disciplined by God.
6. What were your feelings or thoughts throughout that time?
7. What good things have resulted in your life from God's discipline?
8. Read the following testimonies of God's discipline in the lives of people that He loves. Share your thoughts with the rest of the class.

Testimony 1

One truthseeker received the Holy Spirit upon coming to the True Jesus Church. Reluctant to take the next step in getting baptized she prayed to God to show her what she should do. The first time the Lord answered her prayers was during one Sabbath service. During the sermon, the elder quoted from Acts 16:22: "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." The sister stared with astonishment at the speaker and wondered if this was truly God speaking to her.

That same evening while making a final prayer for the day, the sister asked the Lord a second time about whether she should get baptized and if this was the right time to be baptized or if she should wait for her husband who was still an atheist. As she prayed in this way, the Holy Spirit came down upon her mightily. Her tongue began to roll very fluently and her entire body vibrated greatly. The entire room shook; the bed vibrated and even the windows rattled loudly. Her non-believing husband was stunned to witness such a scene. Still, the sister was not fully convinced.

The next evening she asked God a third time. This time, the Lord answered her

question through a dream. In her dream she saw two people engaged in conversation, in a place that was filled with glory and light. Both were wearing white robes. She noticed that she was one of them and the other was the Lord Jesus. In the conversation, the sister asked the Lord about getting baptized and about her concerns. The Lord had a very soft, kind and smiling demeanor and He listened attentively and patiently. The more the sister spoke, the more emotional and agitated she grew, and the louder her body gestures became.

As the sister continued in this manner, the Lord suddenly raised His hand and slapped the sister on the face. This woke the sister up from her sleep. Even though it was a dream her face felt painful and stung from the slap. Feeling extremely hurt and angry, she said to God, "I only asked You whether I needed to be baptized, why did You need to go and slap my face?" She turned in her bed and decided there and then that she would not get baptized.

During the following two weeks the sister refused to read the Bible. One day while sitting on the sofa in her living room, she noticed her Bible lying on the coffee table. She picked it up and began to flick through the pages when her eyes fell on the words recorded in Hebrews 12:5–6. She read the words to herself: "And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by Him. For the Lord disciplines him whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives."

After the sister read the passage, the hurt, anger and sorrow that she harbored inside subsided immediately. She was greatly moved by God's love for her. In her heart she heard the Lord say to her, "Your Father disciplined you for your own good". The sister decided then to receive baptism.

Testimony 2

Brother N was baptized into the True Jesus Church only a couple of days after he was born. Although he grew up in a Christian family, he was not interested in church. He would much rather gamble and have fun. He'd use his lunch money to play the slot machines in the arcades, and instead of going to church on the Sabbath, he would go out with friends. Lying, stealing and getting into fights became his way of life. No matter what his mother said or did, brother N would not change. At times when his mother used a bamboo stick to discipline him, he would beg for mercy and apologize to his mother. But as soon as the beating was over, he would go back to his old habits. In a desperate search for a solution, his mother sent him to the United States to study in the hope that a change of envi-

ronment would change her son. At the age of 11, brother N departed for San Diego where he was to stay with his aunt and her family who were atheists. Over time, he began to lose his faith. He stopped going to church and lived a life pursuing worldly things. Gradually, he did not believe in the existence of God and forgot how to pray.

At the age of 17, something happened that was to change Brother N for life. One night, when he was alone in the house, he suddenly heard a soft and kind voice telling him to, "Go to pray." He became scared and quickly looked around the living room to see if anyone was there. There was no one. Thinking that it was probably his own imagination playing tricks on him, he returned to his own room. He closed the door behind him immediately and turned on the light. Just when he felt safe, he heard the voice again saying to him, "Go to pray." This time he knew it was not his imagination. It was a kind and tender male voice, the likes that could never be heard on this earth. Brother N knew instantly that it was the Lord Jesus calling him. He felt he could not refuse to pray and he was afraid that if he did not pray, God might discipline him the way his mother did many years ago. Without realizing it, Brother N knelt down, clasped his hands, and said, "In the Name of the Lord Jesus I pray, Hallelujah praise the Lord Jesus, Hallelujah praise the Lord Jesus..." Less than five minutes later, tears streamed down his face, and he began to cry bitterly. Suddenly, God opened his eyes to see a vision. In the vision, brother N saw thousands of small TV screens. Each screen displayed all the bad things that he had done since childhood, deeds done in secret and the deeds done in public. God later showed him the consequences of his deeds; his deeds incurred anger, loss, injury and sorrow to the people around him. He could not deny any of it.

One scene showed an incident that occurred when brother N was still in Taiwan. Curious about deflating a tire, brother N placed a handful of tacks underneath one of the tires of his neighbor's taxi. Hiding behind a bush he watched to see what would happen. To his disappointment, the taxi driver simply drove off. In the vision however, God revealed to brother N the consequences of his actions. He saw an angry taxi driver staring at a deflated wheel that had been punctured by the tacks. Another scene that brother N saw was one of his mother. He saw his mother praying alone for her lost son. The air was heavy with sadness and sorrow. And in the light of the moon, he could see teardrops flowing down his mother's face. For seven years his mother had prayed unceasingly for her son to return to God. Upon witnessing these scenes, brother N realized that he was a sinner and repented bitterly of all the evil things that he had committed. He resolved to change his ways and to make the Lord Jesus, His Savior and God.

Testimony 3

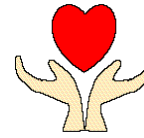
One summer, two brothers planned for a day of fishing. A few days prior to this, they logged onto the Internet to check the fish count. Seeing that there was plenty of fish, they decided to go. They decided to go for only half a day thinking that if there is a lot of fish, then they should be able to catch plenty and save on boat fare at the same time. At five in the morning, the brothers set out with eager anticipation of catching a lot of fish. But for the whole morning, they did not catch a single bite. They returned to the shore full of disappointment. They comforted each other with the thought that there was probably no fish that day. Even the captain of the boat was puzzled that there was no catch. To have absolute zero counts was extremely rare, particularly when it was a good fishing season. Since this was the case, brother X then asked brother Y if he would come with him to church to help plant a tree. It was only then that brother Y realized that brother X was responsible for planting a tree at church but he had set aside his responsibilities to go fishing instead. The reason why they could not catch any fish that morning was because brother X had not finished the work he had promised to do. The next day, brother X again logged onto the Internet to check the fish count. He learned that the boat that the brothers had gone out on that morning had zero count. But what surprised him was that the other boats that went out that same morning had all returned with great catches.

Testimony 4

One evening, a newly converted sister had a desire to watch an X-rated movie. Although she realized it was wrong, the temptation was too hard to resist. Justifying herself, she said to God, "This would be the last time" and without further thought, she sat and watched the entire movie. Not long afterwards, a sty developed in her eye. It swelled to such an extent that when she went to the doctors, they commented that this was one of the worst cases they had ever seen. Besides the swelling, there was a secretion of pus and blood. The only thing the doctors could do was to prescribe her some medication. That night at 2 am, the sister drove around town looking for an open pharmacy. The cost of the entire treatment set her back about \$500-600. The sister understood that this was a lesson from God. In her prayers, she repented of her actions and about a week later, the swelling subsided.

Suggested Reading:

The Lord's Pruning, Manna, Issue 29.



Dear Lord, how painful it is to be struck with Your rod of love. But through its stripes, we are healed of our waywardness and our souls of stubbornness. From the experience we can bear an abundant harvest of righteousness. Lord, teach us to be grateful when we are disciplined by You for You discipline those whom you love.