



Key Passage: Ezekiel 37:5

Key Thought: God's presence is the key to life.¹

The Gospel in Ezekiel:

1. Late night infomercials promise healing elixirs to cure every ill. We choose them out of curiosity or even desperation. Sad when the true elixir is bypassed for the sham.
2. Ezekiel prophecies that God's spirit is abandoning the Temple (8:3-4; 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23). Enormously bad:
 - (a) Spirit leaving means presence of God leaving, which means death (life leaves)
 - (b) Ezekiel knew firsthand what that is like
3. About a decade before the fall and exile of Judah (thus around 587 BC), Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and ransacked the place. He took royal treasures out of the palace and the Temple, put a new king on the throne (Zedekiah), and took the old king (Jehoiachin), along with 10,000 people, into exile (2 Kings 24:1, 8-17). Including Ezekiel. So he knew what that felt like. The old prophet Jeremiah is in

¹ Note, key passages, key thoughts, and hook questions come from Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*. These notes are compiled from 4 principal sources. In addition to Michael Williams book, notes are also derived from Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences*, Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, and H. H. Drake Williams, *Making Sense of the Bible*.

Jerusalem giving his grave warnings. The young Ezekiel (who was 25 when he got taken) is in Babylon among the Exiles about to do his calling. He was a priest in training. About 5 years later—when he is around 30—Ezekiel is visited by God by a canal in Babylon and there God calls Ezekiel to be a prophet.

4. Now, Ezekiel begins to prophecy that Jerusalem is going to be destroyed, Judah is going to fall (all of which happened in 586 BC). The writing is on the wall, so to speak. There were false prophets telling them “Jerusalem will never fall; we are headed home any day now.” Ezekiel knew that wasn’t true: it would fall in just 5 short years. So Ezekiel lies on his side “besieging” a clay model of the city to show that the city is about to get destroyed (Ezekiel 4-5). And what do the people do? Well they run to the Temple of course to seek help from their gods. The problem is that they weren’t running to Yahweh. You see, they had set up their own false gods in the Temple itself! They went to the place where the source of healing could be found but were seeking sham elixirs instead (see chapter 8)! So only death and destruction awaited. The glory is gone. And Jerusalem falls.

5. Excursus: Possible responses to God bringing devastation:

(a) Claim God abandoned us, better without him, and go back to pagan practices (Jeremiah 44).

(b) God sent judgment, but it is so vicious (look up how the Babylonians treated the women and children), does God care? (Lamentations 1-3a struggles with this)

(c) God sent judgment, but when will he do the same to the enemies? The Psalms call for Edom and Babylon to be treated the same (Psalm 137)

(d) If God is doing this, it’s unfair—it was our parents and grandparents fault, and we reap the consequences of their actions! (see Ezekiel 18; 33). Answer: God was patient with earlier generations; but this generation is not innocent. They and their ancestors guilty; God’s patience with them and vengeance on you shows mercy and justice, not evil.

(e) It’s God’s doing, we deserved it, God has left, so that means there is no covenant anymore, and there is no hope. Might as well be dead bones in a grave (Ezekiel hears them saying that in Ezekiel 37:11).

(f) True and full understanding: God’s actions are logical but limited (says so in Deuteronomy). Punish to teach and restore. But what parent gives up on his children?

6. Even after Jerusalem falls, Ezekiel continues to preach and prophesy. Judgment is often God’s word in situations like these, but judgment is never God’s final word. There is always hope if they would but turn to him (see a plea for that in Psalm 74).

7.. God’s grace is on full display here. Grace: “getting what you don’t deserve.” Over and abundant. It would be enough for God to let them live. It is more so for him to let them return to their land and be a people once again. But God says even more. Ezekiel 34-48 is full of incredible hope awaiting God’s people in the future!

(1) Ezekiel 34: a restoration of the kingdom of David. (see v.23-24: David will be prince over them)

(2) Ezekiel 36: The security of Israel's land and the cleansing of Israel's sin and shame. A complete "cleansing" (priestly): 36:25; 37:23.

(3) Ezekiel 37: a national resurrection and reunification. We have the famous valley of dry bones. The bones come to life by the breath or wind of God—a sign that God's spirit can bring his people back.

(4) Ezekiel 38-39: destruction of God's and Israel's enemies

(5) Ezekiel 40-48: restoration of the worship of God in a revitalized land and a new restored temple, with God fully present! The imagery is of a resurrection and full restoration, and a new place with God being present and giving new life. A place with plenty of fish and animals, fruit trees and a rich harvest to follow, reminder of Eden itself (34:25-27, 29; 36:30, 33-35). And in the center of this new place would be a Temple—a new restored Temple (Ezekiel 43)—and out of this new Temple where God dwells would flow life-giving and life-healing rivers of living water (47:1-12). And the name of the city shall be: "The Lord is there." (Ezekiel 48:35)

8. Fulfillment: 600 years later, God comes to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He "tabernacled" among us (John 1:14) and his body was, in fact, the new Temple (John 2:13-21). And then in John 4:1-14, Jesus tells a Samaritan woman that he gives life-giving, life-healing water which is the presence of God's Holy Spirit (see John 7). This comes from Christ, as if coming out of the Temple of God. Christ is the glory returning to the Temple.

9. The question: would they accept God's presence in God's Temple and the life-giving waters flowing from it, or would they reject God's presence in God's Temple and become a valley of dry bones. Jesus is the source of life, and all who acknowledge that participate in that life (John 1:4; 6:47)

10. Then he says more. Jesus left, right? Not exactly. The body of Jesus is still here. The Temple is still here! For the Spirit of God dwells in the Temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you! He continues to build his new, restored temple one Christian at a time! (See Ephesians 2:19-22). Name of this city: "The Lord is there" (see Matt 28:20). We died (and became dry bones); but are rejuvenated by God's spirit, and thus Christ who is our life now (Col 3:1-4), promises our future appearance in "glory."

Hook Questions:²

1. Does your focus enrich your life or deplete it? Where are you looking for life? Do you look for life from the author of life, or from something that is a cheap imitation? Whose warranty do you think is better? How could you enhance God's presence in your life?

² Taken from Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*, p.107.

2. Does your life point others toward the source of life? Can others—by looking at your life--sense God's presence with you? Does your abundant life spill over into other people's lives?