

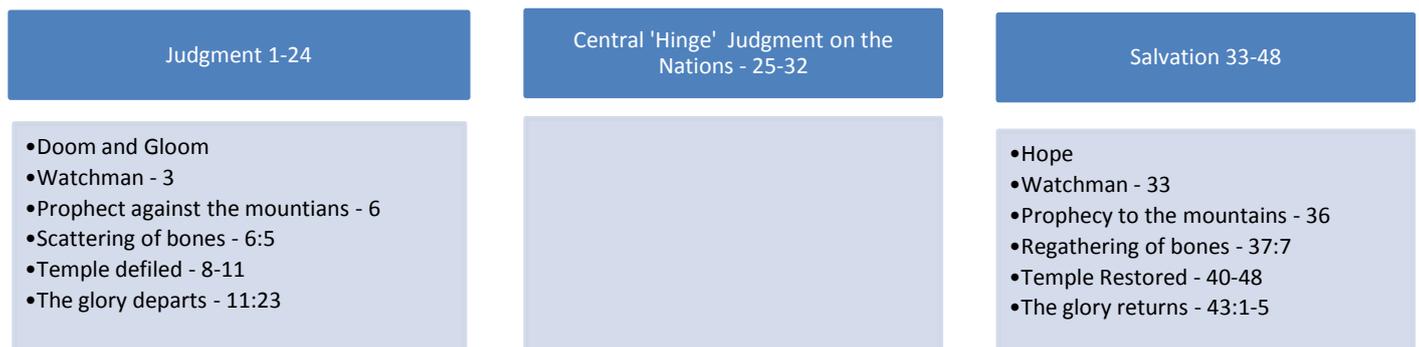
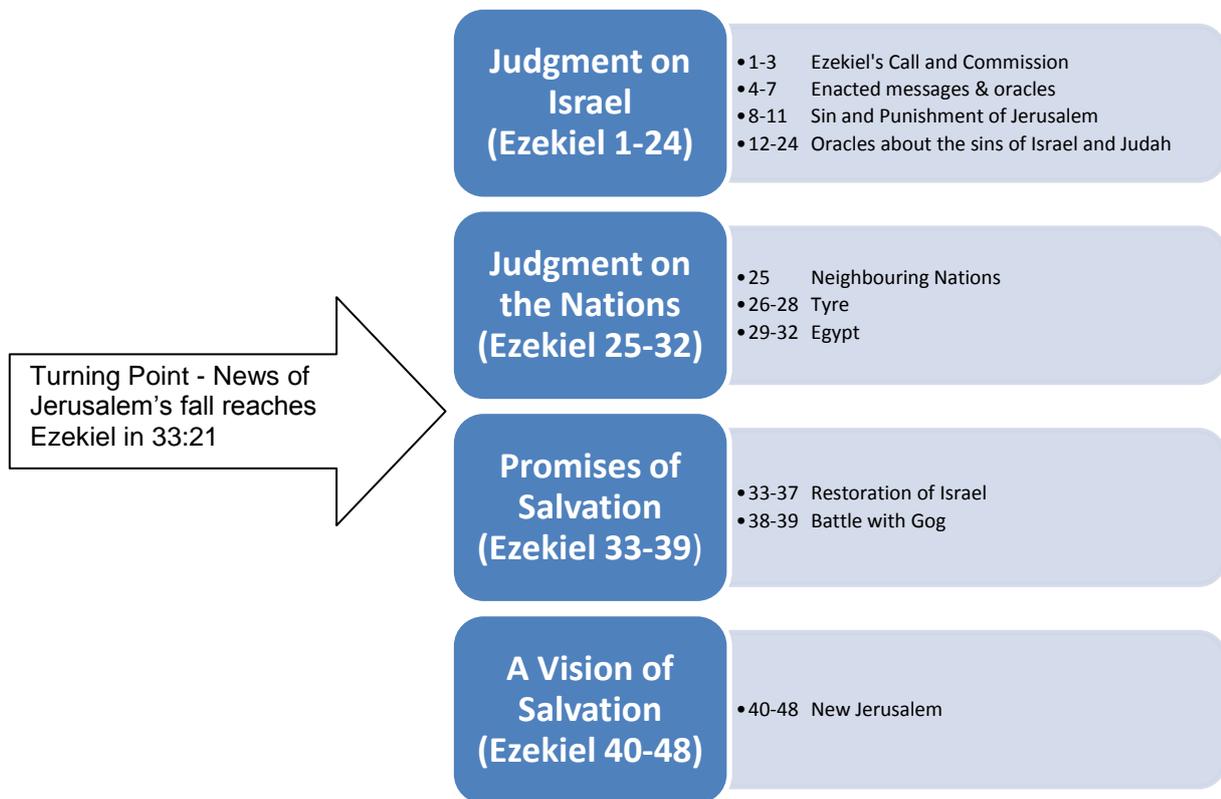
A Guide to Reading Ezekiel

Ezekiel is a colourful character who uses vivid images and powerful symbolic actions. His book is long and daunting (48 Chapters), but very important for our understanding of the coming of the kingdom of God. It includes important teaching about God, judgment and salvation, the resurrection, the coming of the good shepherd, the arrival of David's son, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, and the Christian hope.

Some background

- Ezekiel was a prophet in the time of “the exile” (when God punished Israel for her sin through being removed from the Promised Land to live as captives in Babylon). Jeremiah and Daniel also lived at this time.
- Ezekiel was one of the Jews transported from Jerusalem to Babylon in 597BC. This was the first stage of “the exile” when God’s people were exiled from the Promised Land (See 2 Kings 24:10-17).
- In Babylon Ezekiel prophesied about God’s judgment on sinful Israel, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. After this happened in 587 BC (See 2 Kings 25:8-25), Ezekiel prophesies more broadly about God’s judgment on all nations. The book finishes with wonderful promises about the restoration of the people of Israel and the new temple.

Structure



Ezekiel 1

1. In what ways do people commonly picture God? On what basis do you think people form these impressions?
2. The book of Ezekiel opens with a great vision of “the appearance of the form of the Lord’s glory” (1:28b). Read 2 Kings 24:8-17 and Ezekiel 1:1-4 to understand the setting for this vision.

Some key dates...

597 BC – King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon deports the young king Jehoiachin, 10000 of Judah’s statesmen, soldiers and craftsmen to exile. Among themn was Ezekiel.
593 BC – Ezekiel’s vision while in exile in Babylon - in “the fifth year of king Jehoiachin’s exile” (v2)
586/587 BC – Jerusalem is revisited and destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar. This is the final judgment of God on the sin of God’s ancient people.
571 BC – The last known date of Ezekiel’s prophecy (29:17) – Ezekiel’s ministry lasted around 22 years

- a) What do we learn from verses 1-4 about Ezekiel and his situation?
 - b) What do you think Ezekiel and the exiles might have been thinking/feeling at this time?
3. The vision is described in five sections.
 - v 4 Wind/Cloud, Fire, Brilliant Light
 - v 5-14 The form of four living creatures
 - v 15-21 The wheels beside each creature
 - v 22-25 The shape of an expanse over the living creatures
 - v 26-28 The shape of a throne with the form of the appearance of a human on it
Fire, Brilliant Light, Cloud
 - a) Read verses 4-28. Although its probably not meant to be drawn, to help you take in the details, see if you can sketch what Ezekiel saw. (Use the back of this page)
 - b) As you read the details, what elements seem to be significant? What might different elements symbolise? Does anything remind you of other parts of the Bible?
 - c) What Ezekiel saw has been described as “God’s Mobile Throne”. What does this vision communicate about God and his kingship – especially to the people living in exile?
 4. How does this vision help us to understand and appreciate the coming of Jesus? Read and reflect on John 1:14-16 & 2 Corinthians 4:6.
 5. As Christians we live as ‘exiles’ from our heavenly home. How might reading this chapter help us to live as Jesus’ disciples?
 6. Spend time praying together about these things. Dont forget to praise God for his glory?

Ezekiel 2:1-3:15

1. In the Western World today there is much resistance to God and his words. In what ways are we tempted to respond?
2. Having seen the vision of the “appearance of the form of the Lord’s glory”, Ezekiel is commissioned to speak on behalf of God. Read Ezekiel 2-3:15.
 - a. How does God prepare Ezekiel to be commissioned as his prophet? (2:1-2 & 3:12-13)
 - b. To whom is Ezekiel being sent? How are they described? (2:3-4a)
 - c. What is Ezekiel’s task? What will be the measure of his ‘success’? (2:4b-5 & 3:10-11)
 - d. Why won’t the Israelites listen to Ezekiel? (3:4-7)
 - e. What attributes will Ezekiel need for this task? (2: 6-7 & 3:8-9)
 - f. What do you make of Ezekiel’s initial response? (3:14-15)
3. In 2:8-3:3 Ezekiel is given a scroll to eat (remember we are still in the midst of his “visions”).
 - a. What do you think is the symbolism of
 - i. The way the scroll is filled with writing?
 - ii. The content – words of “lamentation, mourning and woe”?
 - iii. Ezekiel eating the scroll?
 - b. Why do you think a scroll of “lamentation, mourning and woe” tasted “sweet as honey” in his mouth? (See also Psalm 19:7-11 & Revelation 10:8-11).
4. Why do you think God commissions a prophet to speak on his behalf? (See also 3:16-21).
5. In what ways does Ezekiel foreshadow or prepare for Jesus? (See also Acts 3:11-26)
6. Jesus has commissioned us to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-20). What is similar or different between Ezekiel’s situation and ours? How does Ezekiel’s commissioning help us ‘share Christ’ with others?

(As time permits you may like to consider John 15:18-25, 1 Peter 2:11-12, 3:13-16 & 2 Timothy 4:1-5).
7. Pray together in response to what you have read and discussed. Think about praise, confession, thanks and requests. What might you pray for each other, and for those who have the task of public gospel proclamation in churches and in the world?

Ezekiel 3:16-7:27

1. Although it is found throughout the Bible, most people find the reality of God acting to 'punish' human rebellion very difficult. Why do you think this is?

In the first section of the book (1:1-3:15) Ezekiel is commissioned (via a visionary experience) to speak on behalf of God. In the next section he is called to communicate by symbolic actions (4:1-5:4) interpreted by an "oracle" (5:5-17). Further oracles then repeat and reinforce the message (6:1-7:27). In this study we will focus on 3:16-5:17.

2. Read 3:16-27. This seems to be a further commissioning following Ezekiel's 7 days of being "stunned". What is added here to our understanding of Ezekiel's task?
3. Read 4:1-5:4. Four dramatic actions communicate powerfully to the exiles in Babylon. They seem to occur at Ezekiel's house (3:24 & 8:1) over a period of 14 months (1:2 & 8:1). What is the message of each? How would you summarize the overall message?
 - a. 4:1-3
 - b. 4:4-8
 - c. 4:9-17
 - d. 5:1-4

(As time permits you might like to read 2 Kings 25:1-12 to see the historical account of these things.)

4. Although Ezekiel was "mute", God enabled him to speak in order to deliver prophetic 'oracles'. Read 5:5-17.
 - a. Of what 'crime' is Israel guilty?
 - b. What is the 'sentence' announced by God? Which details of the symbolic actions are explained here?
 - c. The "nations" feature heavily in this section (see esp v 5, 6-7, 8 & 14-15)? What does this imply about why Israel's sin was so serious?
 - d. Israel was warned of the consequences of rebellion (eg. Leviticus 26:14-45). How might this help us to understand why God will bring this disaster on his people?
5. Are there any notes of hope in this section? (Beyond what you've read, see also 6:8-10).
6. What do we learn from all this about God? (What might you say to someone who says "I can't believe in a God who sends such destruction on people"?)
7. How does seeing the reality of God's judgment in history deepen our understanding of and response to...
 - a. Jesus and his death (1 Peter 3:18)
 - b. The final judgment ("hell") (Hebrews 10:26-31)
8. How does knowing God and the reality of his judgment shape our lives as Christians? Pray for each other about this.

Ezekiel 8-11

1. Where or when do people commonly think that God is present today? How might different people respond to an awareness of God's presence?
2. In the Old Testament God dwelt with his people in his sanctuary – within the temple in Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 8:10-13). This was a source of great confidence for Israel. However, God's continued presence with them could not be taken for granted. Read 1 Kings 9:1-9. What clear warning is given here?
3. Ezekiel 8-11 is one long vision given to Ezekiel (who is with the exiles in Babylon). Ezekiel is shown the glory of the Lord departing from the temple and from the city of Jerusalem. Read these verses to get a sense of the vision, tracing the movements of "the glory"
8:1-4
9:3 & 10:3-4
10:18-19
11:22-25
4. In his vision Ezekiel (and through him the exiles) are shown why the glory departs from the temple. Read 8:5-18. Ezekiel is shown four scenes of things "detestable" to God (vs 5-6, 7-13, 14-15 & 16-17). Is there anything that connects these? What is God's response (v 18)?

Do you think the people of the time would have been aware that their religious practices were so offensive to God? What might we learn from this?

5. In chapters 9 & 10 Ezekiel is shown how God's judgment falls on the people of Jerusalem and on the city itself. Read 9:1-11. In the midst of the coming judgment, some receive a "mark" and are spared. What does this teach us about God?
6. Having been shown the sins of the people in Jerusalem, the terrible "slaughter" and the departure of God's glory from the temple – how might the Israelites who were in exile in Babylon have been feeling? (See 11:13)
7. In Chapter 11, God has a word of hope especially for the exiles in Babylon. Read 11:14-21. What does God promise to do?
8. These promises are ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now God dwells in us (individually and as the church). According to the apostles what implications flow from this...
1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (See v 3-4 for a sense of the problem being addressed)
1 Corinthians 6:18-20
2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1
9. Is there anything in your life (or in our church) that is inconsistent with being the 'sanctuary' of God? Confess these things to God. Give thanks for Jesus and the holy status we enjoy in him. Ask God to keep changing you (and us all) to grow in holiness of life.

Ezekiel 25-32 (esp 28)

1. We live in a wealthy country. What dangers and opportunities might this hold for our spiritual life?
2. In Ezekiel, between the announcement of God's judgment on Israel and His promises of future salvation, we find eight chapters announcing judgment upon the nations surrounding Israel...



Seven nations (representing the complete number?) are addressed, with a special focus on Tyre & Egypt (and their kings). In this study we will focus mainly on the oracles concerning the king of Tyre. First however, there is an important repeated theme to notice. Read these verses to get a feel for it: 25:6-7, 25:8 & 11, 25:12 & 14, 25:15 & 17, 26:2-3 & 6, 28:22, 29:6.

- a) Why will God judge these nations? What will they learn?
 - b) What does this teach us about "Yahweh", the God of Israel? How does this challenge our thinking about God and "the nations" of the world today?
 - c) Since Ezekiel's time we have seen God's judgment fall on Jesus in his death, and God's kingdom established through Jesus' resurrection/exaltation. How can people today avoid making the same mistake as the nations of Ezekiel's time?
3. In chapters 26 & 27 we learn that Tyre had become wealthy and powerful through her sea trade, but she will be completely destroyed. In chapter 28 the focus shifts to the king of Tyre. Read 28:1-19.
 - a. What do we learn about the king of Tyre? Why is he condemned?
 - b. To whom is he compared/linked (esp in v 12-16)?
 - c. What will happen to him? (Note the similarities with Acts 12:20-25!)
 - d. What warning is here for us in our wealthy society?
 4. Read Philippians 2:5-11. Christians are called to have the same mindset as Jesus. How does Jesus' attitude and outcome contrast with the king of Tyre?
 5. (As time permits) A hard question to make you think - Look again at the diagram summarizing the structure of Ezekiel. What do we learn from the placement of the oracles of judgment on the nations after those focusing on Israel, and before the promises of salvation? (Could there be clues in Ezekiel 28:24-26?)
 6. From what you've discussed, how can you respond to God in prayer?

Ezekiel 33

1. What situations would people generally say are “a matter of life and death”?

Chapter 33 is a major turning point in the book of Ezekiel. After 32 chapters announcing God’s judgment and the impending destruction of Jerusalem, in 33:21-22 news of the city’s fall now reaches Ezekiel and the exiles in Babylon. This confirms what Ezekiel has prophesied, and also begins a new phase of his ministry – looking forward to God’s restoration of his kingdom.



2. Ezekiel was previously appointed as a “watchman” over the house of Israel (3:16-21). Now he is commanded to bring this image before the people. Read Ezekiel 33:1-9.
 - a. What is a watchman’s responsibility? In what sense is Ezekiel a “watchman”?
 - b. What is the appropriate way to ‘hear’ (ie. respond to) the watchman’s message? What is at stake?
3. The people in exile seem to have some complaints/excuses for not obeying God’s word. Two complaints are identified and addressed in verses 10 & 17. Read v 10-20.
 - a. What are the two complaints? How does God respond to each?
 - b. What hope is there for those in exile (those experiencing the judgment of God on the nation)?
 - c. What must the people do? What is at stake? (See the equivalent for us in John 3:16-18)
4. You might think that news of the fall of Jerusalem would have changed the hearts of the people. The last section of the chapter shows otherwise.
 - a. Read v 23-29. What was the ‘mindset’ of those still living in the ruins of the land of Israel? What was their spiritual problem? What will the outcome be for them?
 - b. Read v 30-33. Instead of responding to Ezekiel as a “watchman”, how did the people in exile regard him? What was their spiritual problem? (The problem still remained in the time of Jesus – Mark 7:6-8)
5. In what ways might we be tempted to make the same mistakes as Ezekiel’s hearers? (See James 1:22-25)
6. What practical steps could you take to ensure that you not only hear, but obey God’s word?

(Note: There is a helpful booklet by Christopher Ash called “Listen Up: A Practical Guide to listening to Sermons”. It’s available for about \$3 from the Reformers Bookshop or Koorong).

Ezekiel 34

1. Promises can be very powerful. In what ways might a reliable promise change your life and/or lift your spirits?

Ezekiel originally spoke to God's people who were exiled to Babylon. They had lost all the physical features of the former 'kingdom' – land, temple, king, security, etc. What hope remains for the future of God's Kingdom? What hope for the future of God's relationship with his people? After the fall of Jerusalem (reported in 33:21-22) chapters 34-37 present wonderful promises of restoration – beyond what was ever experienced before.

Ezekiel 34 consists of 2 oracles using the image of Shepherds and Sheep. The "Shepherd" was a common image in the Old Testament for the king – who was supposed to care for the flock (the people).

v 1-16 Concerning the Shepherds		v 17-21 Concerning the Sheep	
v 1-6	Indictment	v 17-19	Indictment
v 7-10	Judgement	v 20-22	Judgement
v 11-16	Promise of a good shepherd	v 23-24	Promise of a good shepherd
		v 25-31	Climax – A Covenant of Peace

2. Read Ezekiel 34.
 - a. What were the sins of the shepherds (v1-6) and the sheep (v 17-19)? What had this meant for the condition/situation of the flock?
 - b. What does God promise to do? (See esp v 7-16 & 20-24) See how many promises you can find.
 - c. What do you think the phrase "covenant of peace" means? How would you summarize the outcome of this (from v 25-31)?
3. When and how does God keep these promises? These passages might help - Ezra 1:1-7, Romans 1:1-4, Luke 19:9-10, John 10:11-16, Matthew 25:31-32, Revelation 21:1-4.
4. (As time permits) What can we learn from Ezekiel 34 about the role of Christian leaders in the church? See also Acts 20:28-29 & 1 Peter 5:2-4.
5. God's end time Kingdom has been established with the coming of Jesus. It's full and final realization however, remains a promise for the future.
 - a. How does what we've seen in this study help us to trust in God's promises?
 - b. How does this change our lives and lift our spirits?
6. Give thanks to God for his promises, and their fulfilment. Ask God to help you trust his promises in the hard times when all seems lost, and also in the good times. Pray for those who shepherd God's flock today.

Ezekiel 36

1. How would you describe God's "name" (reputation) in our world today? How does the state of his name make you feel?

Following the news of the fall of Jerusalem in 33:21-22, Ezekiel brings a message of hope to the people of Israel. In chapter 34 God promises to be their shepherd and rescue them. In chapter 35 He promises to destroy Israel's enemy – Edom. In chapter 36 God promises to transform both the land (v 1-15) and the people of Israel (v 16-32). God's renewed people will live in God's land and enjoy his blessing. Through this the world will honour Yahweh.

2. Read Ezekiel 36:16-23.
 - a. Why did God send the people out of the land into exile?
 - b. Why will he bring them back?
3. Some people say that God's concern for his own name seems profoundly self centred. Is it ? Why or why not? (See a similar motive in Ephesians 1:6 & 11-14)

4. Read verses 24-32. The outcome of God demonstrating his holiness is salvation for his people.

- a. What promises does God make?

v 24

v 28

v 25

v 29

v 26

v 30

v 27

- b. How would you summarise what God promises to do?

- c. Do you think the outcome in verses 31 & 32 is positive or negative? Why? How is God's salvation a motive for repentance?

- d. To what extent have these promises been fulfilled? What is still to come? (Reflect on Jesus' words in John 3:3-8. See also Ephesians 1:13-14 & Romans 8:10-17)

5. What results will follow from God keeping his promises?

v 33-36 (esp 36)

v 37-38

6. How might a greater concern for God's name change the way you think, pray and live?

Ezekiel 37

1. Many people find God's promise to raise people from the dead too hard to believe. Why do you think this is?

In Ezekiel 34-36 God has made wonderful promises to his people in exile. He has promised to rescue and restore them to live as his people in his land and enjoy his blessing. However, they found this hard to believe. In 37:11 we see what they were saying - "Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished, we are cut off". How can it be possible for Israel to live again?

Chapter 37 consists of two sections, both culminating with people knowing Yahweh...

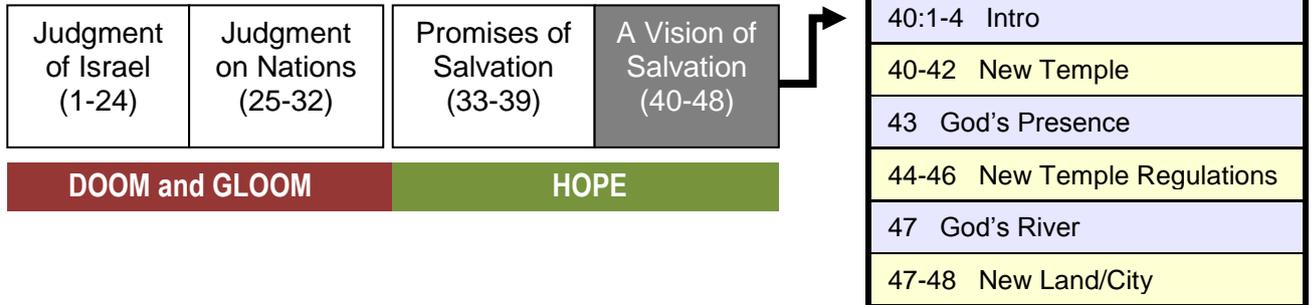
v 1-14	Vision + Interpretation	Theme: The reconstitution of Israel.
v 15-28	Symbollic Action + Interpretation	Theme: The reunification of Israel (and much more!)

2. Read 37:1-14.
 - a. What does the description of the bones in verses 1-2 say about the situation of the nation?
 - b. What does God use/do to bring life to these dead bones?
 - c. What is the significance of the 2 stage resurrection in v 7-10? (See Genesis 2:7)
 - d. What is the message to those who doubted (and who doubt today!) that God's people had any future?
3. Beyond the physical return of Israel to their land, this vision is part of the Biblical theme of resurrection. As time permits read John 5:24-29, Ephesians 1:17-2:7 & 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. In what ways has/does/will God bring the dead to life? How does he do this? What implications flow from this for us now?
4. Read 37:15-28. (The kingdom of Israel was divided after the reign of Solomon. – 1 Kings 12)
 - a. List the features of the promised united kingdom? This 'pulls together' much of what has been promised in chapters 34-36, but there is a new emphasis in verses 25-28. What is it?
 - b. In Jesus God has united people under one king - even from 'the nations'. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. What implications flow from seeing this (see Ephesians 4:1-6)?
5. How does understanding God's promises to Israel and their fulfilment (past, present and future) make you feel? How might these promises strengthen your faith, hope and love?
6. Praise God that he is gives life to the dead. Pray that we might know and appreciate his resurrection power (Ephesians 1:15-19). Pray that we would trust and rejoice in his promises, and live as his united people.

Ezekiel 40-48

1. When people are excited about something they tend to talk about it in great detail – savouring every aspect. Can you think of examples – for you or others you know?

In the final section of Ezekiel we see a grand vision of the future. The focus is on the temple/land/city – the dwelling place of God. Here is a summary of the contents...



2. Read Ezekiel 40:1-9 & 43:1-7 and cast your eye over the contents of chapters 40-46.
 - a. Why do you think the temple is described in such detail? (Note that this detail is similar to the descriptions of the tabernacle in Exodus 25-40 & the land in Joshua 13-21).
 - b. In chapters 8-10 Ezekiel saw a vision of the glory of the Lord departing from the temple in Jerusalem, now he sees it return to this new temple. What might this have meant to the people in exile?
 - c. What implication/response does God call for in 43:10-12
3. Read Ezekiel 47:1-12. What is the effect of the river that flows from the temple?
4. Cast your eye over chapters 47-48 & read Ezekiel 48:30-34. In what way is the closing sentence (v35) a fitting end to the book?
5. This section is part of the major biblical themes of the presence of God with his people, and the way blessing (life) flows from this to the world. Read these passages and see what connections you can find to Ezekiel. (If time is short – go straight to Revelation 21-22)
 - The Garden of Eden - Genesis 2:8-14
 - The City – Psalm 46:1-7 & 48:1-3 & 9-14
 - Jesus – John 1:14, 2:19-22, 4:10-14, 7:37-39
 - The New Creation – Revelation 21:1-2 & 21:9-22:5
6. To what extent is being in the presence of God something for which you long? How/when do you think that 'longing' might be strengthened?
7. Congratulations – you have now reached the end of these studies from Ezekiel. What in particular have you learnt from the book – what will stick with you? What do you think is the main message of the book?
8. Give thanks to God and pray for each other.