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# EZEKIEL 25-48

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Lesson 32, Old Testament, Adult Religion Class, Tuesday, 24 April 2012

## Study Guide

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### INTRODUCTION

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Ezekiel's name in Hebrew is *yēḥezqēl*, meaning 'God strengthens' or 'strengthened by God.' It's an appropriate name for a man hauled off to Babylon against his will, forced to settle and live in a strange land, and then called of God to prophesy to his fellow exiles.

Ezekiel's call was to minister among his fellow exiles, first preparing them for the inevitable fall of Jerusalem and Judah, the consoling them when it happened. Like Isaiah and Jeremiah but perhaps to a greater extent, the Lord called on him to make his own life an example as he symbolically re-enacted or acted out several of his prophecies.

Many find Ezekiel challenging to understand. The Jews nearly excluded it from their canon, saying that it would never be fully understood until Elijah came and explained it. Jerome, and early Christian who

translated the Vulgate (Latin) version of the scripture struggled with the book. Early Protestant leaders like Calvin and Luther virtually ignored it. Even modern Latter-day Saint scholars evoke Joseph Smith's words that we are not responsible for understanding images for which God has given no interpretation. But Ezekiel's writings are influenced by where he lived. Like Daniel, he includes Aramaic words and phrases in his text, and many of the images are best understood in the context or the Akkadian culture of the day.

John's writing in Revelation was clearly influenced by Ezekiel, using many of the same apocalyptic and eschatological images. Ezekiel clearly struggles to express what he sees in vision, using language that is symbolic and not literal and saying things have 'the appearance of' or 'the likeness of' instead of just saying what they were.

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### OUTLINE

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Except for chapter 29 (which should probably be between chapters 25 and 26), the book of Ezekiel is presented in chronological order. Ezekiel's book has a number of dates in it, often including even the month and day, making it easy to date many of the events of his life (this includes: 1:2; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1; 29:17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1; 32:17; 33:21; and 40:1).

The book breaks very naturally into three major sections:

1. Preparing for Jerusalem's Destruction (1-24)
  - a. Ezekiel's call (1-3)
  - b. Judgment against Jerusalem (4-24)
    - i. Signs of God's judgment (4-5)

- ii. Messages about judgment (6-7)
  - iii. Visions of evil in Jerusalem (8-11)
  - iv. Symbols of judgment (12-24)
2. Prophecies Against The Nations (25-32)
  - a. Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia (25)
  - b. Tyre and Sidon (26-28)
  - c. Egypt (29-32)
3. Repentance and Restoration (33-48)
  - a. Repentance (33)
  - b. The gathering of Israel (34-37)
    - i. The true shepherd (34)
    - ii. Nations punished (35:1 – 36:7)
  - iii. The reason for restoration (36:8-38)
  - iv. Images of restoration: bones and sticks (37)

- c. Israel's enemies removed (38-39)
- d. True worship restored (40-46)
  - i. The new temple (40:1 – 43:17)

- ii. Worship of the Lord (43:18 – 46:24)
- e. Restoration of the Land (47-48)

## PROPHECIES AGAINST THE NATIONS (25-32)

Like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel prophesied against Israel's neighbors to let everyone know that just because Israel had been destroyed didn't mean that the heathen nations around them wouldn't also fall

under judgment. These chapters come after the fall of Judah to Babylon but before Ezekiel began to see visions of and expansively speak of great latter-day events.

### AMMON, MOAB, EDOM, AND PHILISTIA (25)

25:2 **the Ammonites.** Ammon was a nation to east of Judah, across the Jordan River. Their punishment comes because they rejoiced in Judah's destruction (said "Aha" in 25:3 and clapped their hands for joy in 25:6); they also participated as Babylonian mercenaries (2 Kings 24:1-2). Their judgment is verses 1-7.

25:4 **deliver thee to the men of the east.** Not the Babylonians but the Bedouin tribes of the east Arabian desert.

25:8 **Moab** Moab was the area south of Ammon, on the east side of the Dead Sea. They were also involved in the attack on Judah (2 Kings 24:1-2). Their judgment is verses 8-11.

25:9 **open the side of Moab.** Or, expose the flank, leaving them vulnerable to attack.

25:12 **Edom.** Edom was south of Moab heading down toward the Arabia Peninsula. Their judgment is verses 12-14.

25:15 **the Philistines.** A persistent enemy of Israel, their judgment is in verses 15-17.

25:16 **the Cherethims.** Or, the Cretans, as the island of Crete was the origin of the Philistine people. Ezekiel's use of this version of their name is a pun; *krtym* also means 'to cut off' (Zondervan 4:458).



## TYRE AND SIDON (26-28)

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26:1 **the eleventh year, in the first day.** This would be 586 BC, shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

26:2 **Tyrus.** Tyre, a port city of the Phoenician kingdom, to the northwest of Judah.

26:4 **like the top of a rock.** Meaning barren and lifeless; see also verse 14. Nebuchadnezzar did attack and destroy Tyre, which was mainly a city on the mainland at the time. But in a few decades, it was rebuilt and extended to the island just off shore. Ezekiel's prophecy seemed not to have been fulfilled. But when Alexander the Great came and Tyre defied



him, he determined to attack the city, building a causeway from the mainland to the island. Using that and his navy, he conquered the city and took them all away. The destruction was so complete that even

today no traces can be found. Alexander's causeway remained and gradually accumulated more sand and dirt, make the old island an inhabited peninsula today (see the map at right that shows approximately the coastline and island line at the time of Ezekiel).

28:3 **wider than Daniel.** Not Daniel, Ezekiel's contemporary, but Dan'el, a proverbial Ugaritic wise man (Zondervan, 4:465).

28:22 **Zidon.** Sidon was Tyre's sister city to the north, another prominent Phoenician trading city. Ezekiel spoke of them in 28:22-26.

## EGYPT (29-32)

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29:1 **tenth year.** This chapter slightly proceeds 26-28 chronologically.

29:3 **the great dragon.** Probably crocodile, as the king of Egypt was often compared to a crocodile, which the Egyptians saw as the god Sobek. Here the Lord will pull the mighty crocodile from the river and leave him to be eaten by beasts and birds.

29:17 **the seven and twentieth year.** This date is way outside of the rest of the dates in the book of Ezekiel, about 571 BC. Some believe that this date was added later either by Ezekiel or another because it relates to Babylon's attack on Egypt at that time.

30:6 **from the tower of Sirene.** "Tower" is Migdol, the name of several fortress towns near the northern Egyptian border. Sirene is the southern edge of the kingdom. Thus the phrase really encompasses the whole of the Egyptian kingdom: 'from the north to the south shall they fall by the sword.'

## REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION (33-48)

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### REPENTANCE (33)

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33:2 **set him for their watchman.** The watchman message continues and is expanded from chapter 3, saying that the watchman has a great stewardship and must cry out and warn the people (compare Jacob 1:19). It is appropriate that the Lord would

revisit this message, which had served as a call to repentance for Ezekiel early in his ministry; now that he has proved fully faithful, it is instead of statement of his status. Instead, the call to repent is directed to the people Ezekiel has been teaching for more than a decade who have struggled to heed this watchman on the tower.

33:15 **he shall surely live.** These verses outline the power of repentance and the tragedy of not fully repenting; the righteous who forgets to continue to repent “shall not be remembered” (33:13) but the wicked that does turn and repent “shall surely live.” Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, “So if you have made covenants, keep them. If you haven’t made them, make them. If you have made them and broken them, repent and repair them. It is *never* too late so long as the Master of the vineyard says there is time. Please listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit telling you right now, this very moment, that you should accept the atoning gift of the Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy the fellowship of His labor. Don’t delay. It’s getting late” (Ensign, May 2012).

33:19 **if the wicked turn from his wickedness.** The word “turn” or “turneth” is used nine times in verses 9-19. The Hebrew word is *šûb*, meaning to turn, return, or bring back. To ‘repent’ in Hebrew means to turn from going one direction and start going a different one instead. Of course, Ezekiel makes it clear that it is more than just changing course; the sinner must also “restore” anything taken, “walk in the statutes of life,” and no more commit sin. The blessing of doing so is clear: “he shall surely live” (33:15).

33:21 **one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came.** About seven months after the actual fall of Jerusalem, someone brought word that all of Ezekiel’s words have been fulfilled.

33:22 **I was no more dumb.** After his wife’s death and his final prophecy of the destruction of the city, Ezekiel was told not to speak any more until his words were validated by one who would escape the destruction (24:24-27).

33:31 **they hear thy words, but they will not do them.** Even though he has been fully vindicated, the people still listen without heeding Ezekiel’s words.

33:33 **a prophet hath been among them.** The Lord promised Ezekiel that one day all would be forced to acknowledge his divine calling and authority.

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## THE GATHERING OF ISRAEL (34-37)

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## THE TRUE SHEPHERD (34)

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34:2 **the shepherds of Israel.** To shepherd means to pasture and graze but it is clearly a metaphor for leadership, ruling, and teaching. The Lord strongly condemned those who claimed to be leading Israel but who were in fact, destroying the flock for their own benefit—eating the sheep, wearing their wool, not caring for the sick or lame, or going after the lost ones. The result is that many were lost, prey of wild animals “because there was no shepherd” (34:8).

34:11 **I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.** In contrast to the wicked shepherds or leaders of Israel, this is the good shepherd who cares for his flock, who searches for and goes to them. He gathers them, brings them to a place of safety, feeds them, and gives them a place to lie down (34:13-14).

34:23 **my servant David.** This is a Messianic prophecy. David in Hebrew means ‘beloved,’ so this phrase could also be rendered ‘my beloved servant’ (compare Matthew 3:17 and many other references where the Father calls the Son ‘beloved’).

34:26 **showers of blessings.** This phrase relates to the “windows of heaven” mentioned later in Malachi 3:10, whereby the Lord blesses the people by pouring down rain from heaven. Here the term is both literal—water was a great blessing in the ancient Near East—and metaphorical, representing the blessings of salvation and more that come from the Lord.

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## NATIONS PUNISHED (35:1 – 36:7)

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35:2 **set thy face against mount Seir.** This chapter refers to Edom and reverts back to the chapters speaking out against Judah’s sinful neighbors.

36:4 **a prey and derision to the residue of the heathen.** There is historical evidence that after Babylon attacked Judah, Edomites moved in and claimed much of the land, which they held until they, too, were conquered by Babylon under Nabonidus in the mid-sixth century.

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## THE REASON FOR RESTORATION (36:8-38)

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36:10 **the wastes shall be builded.** A comforting promise to the scattered people.

36:17 **they defiled it.** The Lord said that Israel defiled the land he gave them by their sins, so he “scattered them among the heathen” (36:19).

36:25 **will I sprinkle clean water upon you.** Water has always been a cleansing agent, used to symbolically make something or someone pure.

36:26 **new heart . . . new spirit.** Harkening back to Ezekiel 11:19-20, the Lord again promises a renewal of the Exodus covenant and the transformation of the heart of his people.

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#### IMAGES OF RESTORATION: BONES AND STICKS (37)

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The context of this chapter is restoration—physical and spiritual. It is interesting to note that the most common phase for resurrection in The Book of Mormon is ‘restoration.’ Ezekiel’s dry bones and two sticks are all about the theme of restoration.

37:1 **the valley which was full of bones.** Ezekiel saw a large valley filled with dead and dry bones. The Lord carried him to this place in vision so he could teach him a powerful lesson about resurrection and restoration.

37:3 **can these bones live?** Ezekiel surely understood the doctrine of the resurrection but must have wondered what the question was really meant to teach him. In response, he simply said, “O Lord God, thou knowest,” reminding us of Nephi’s response when the angel asked him if he understood his vision: “I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17).

37:11 **these bones are the whole house of Israel.** The Lord gave Ezekiel the interpretation, letting us know that the literal image of resurrection is also a metaphor for the restoration of Israel to their promised lands and blessings.

37:17 **join them one to another into one stick.** As is generally understood, the word here for “stick” is ‘wood’ or ‘plank,’ thought to refer to a writing tablet covered with wax or some other substance which

could be used to capture impressed writings (Student Manual, 2:283-284).

37:22 **no more two nations.** Though the prophesy clearly speaks of writings coming together, like the bones of the earlier verses of this chapter, the metaphor also has a message of restoration for the house of Israel, joining them with Judah and making a single nation under a single king—“David my servant” (37:24).

37:26 **everlasting covenant.** The covenant the Lord promises will be part of what happens in his sanctuary, his tabernacle (37:27).

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#### ISRAEL’S ENEMIES REMOVED (38-39)

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Gog and Magog were specific places and peoples to the north and west of Israel but are also representative of the enemies of the people of God. John used similar language in Revelation 20:8. This is a great battle of the last days just before the Second Coming—called by us the battle of Armageddon (see also D&C 29).

38:2 **God, the land of Magog.** Though the exact identification of this leader called Gog whose land is Magog is not known, many have identified him with the king of Lydia, called Magog (after one of the sons of Japeth in Genesis 10:2). Thus the king could be Gyges (668-631) of Anatolia or modern-day Turkey; his name could easily be rendered “Gog” in Hebrew. “The original identity of Gog matters little as later interpreters have understood him to be a transnational symbol of evil” (JPS 1115). See Student Manual 2:284 for a lengthy quote from Elder Bruce R. McConkie on the nature of this battle.

38:15 **a mighty army.** Gog’s army will not only include his own nation but many others from the region. They will combine forces to attack Israel, coming out of the north “as a cloud to cover the land” (38:16).

39:9 **burn them with fire seven years.** Not literally seven years but representative of the perfect amount of time to completely destroy them.

39:23 **hid I my face.** The Lord hid his face from Judah as a result of their sins, letting their enemies

be victorious over them. But in the end, he promises to bring them all back and stop hiding his face that they may have his spirit poured out on them.

### TRUE WORSHIP RESTORED (40-46)

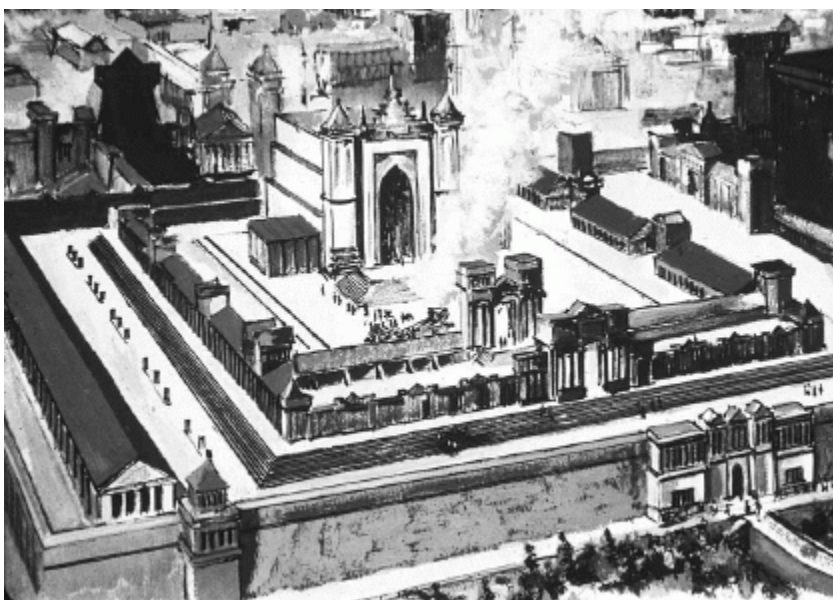
These chapters record a detailed view of the temple that will be built in the last days, and the sacrifices that will be conducted there.

#### THE NEW TEMPLE (40:1 – 43:17)

40:1 **the five and twentieth year.** 672 BC; it's been many years since his last recorded vision. This means that Ezekiel was 50 years old at the time.

40:2 **into the land of Israel.** Ezekiel was carried in vision to his home land, though it looked very different than when he had last seen it. He saw a great house and a messenger with a 10-1/2 foot measuring rod who commanded Ezekiel to write and witness what he was about to see. Zechariah had a similar experience (Zechariah 2:5-9) as did Nephi (1 Nephi 11-14).

40:5 **he measured the breadth of the building.** The messenger used his reed to show Ezekiel the size of all the details of the building. James Talmage wrote about it in his book *House of the Lord*:



In most of its essential features Ezekiel's ideal followed closely the plan of Solomon's Temple;

so close, indeed, is the resemblance, that many of the details specified by Ezekiel have been accepted as those of the splendid edifice destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. A predominant characteristic of the Temple described by Ezekiel was the spaciousness of its premises and the symmetry of both the Holy House and its associated buildings. The area was to be a square of five hundred cubits, walled about and provided with a gateway and arches on each of three sides; on the west side the wall was to be unbroken by arch or portal. At each of the gateways were little chambers regarded as lodges, and provided with porches. In the outer court were other chambers. The entire area was to be elevated, and a flight of steps led to each gateway. In the inner court was seen the great altar, standing before the House, and occupying the center of a square of one hundred cubits. Ample provision was made for every variety of sacrifice and offering, and for the accommodation of the priests, the singers, and all engaged in the holy ritual. The main structure comprised a Porch, a Holy Place, and an inner sanctuary or Most Holy Place, the last named elevated above the rest and reached by steps. The plan provided for even greater exclusiveness than had characterized the sacred area of the Temple of Solomon; the double courts contributed to this end. The service of the Temple was prescribed in detail; the ordinances of the altar, the duties of the priests, the ministry of the Levites, the regulations governing oblations and feasts were all set forth.

The immediate purpose of this revelation through the vision of the prophet appears to have been that of awakening the people of Israel to a realization of their fallen state and a conception of their departed glory (quoted in Student Manual 2:284; image also from same).

43:2 **the glory of the God of Israel came.** Thus far Ezekiel had been guided by a divine messenger, shown all the details of the temple and courtyards. Now the Lord himself came

from the east and entered the temple. Ezekiel saw and heard him speak.

43:3 **like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar.**

Like his first vision in chapter 1, the prophet recognizes that this is the Lord by the symbols around him and by the power of his voice.

43:9 **I will dwell in the midst of them forever.** This temple will not be destroyed or polluted but will be the house of the Lord among his people until the end of time.

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#### WORSHIP OF THE LORD (43:18 – 46:24)

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43:25 **Seven days shalt thou prepare.** These verses describe a cleansing activity lasting seven days that prepares the temple for reuse after the Lord accepts it.

44:2 **This gate shall be shut.** In honor of the Lord entering through the east gate into the temple itself, the gate was to be forever shut.

44:9 **No stranger, uncircumcised.** The Lord set a worthiness standard for entering into the temple after it was accepted by the Lord, just as we have a similar standard today for temples after they are dedicated.

44:17 **clothed with linen garments.** The clothing of the priests who will minister in the temple was outlined, as well as worthiness issues to allow them to serve in the temple.

44:23 **teach my people.** The priests were charged with teaching the people what was holy and clean, and what was profane and unclean.

45:1 **divide by lot the land.** Ezekiel was shown how Israel would be divided up again among the tribes, in strips running west to east, with Joseph getting a double portion (through Ephraim and Manasseh). The division continues in the last half of chapter 47 and most of 48.

45:13 **This is the oblation that ye shall offer.** The rest of 45 and 46 describe the details of the sacrifices that the leaders and priests will offer in that day.

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#### E. RESTORATION OF THE LAND (47-48)

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47:1 **waters issued out.** John uses similar language in Revelation 22:1. These living waters fill the land, heal the Dead Sea and turn it into a prosperous fishing lake, and cause trees and plants to grow throughout the land.

48:31 **the gates of the city shall be after the names of the tribes.** The city itself will have twelve gates, each one named after one of the tribes, similar to Revelation 21:12-14, with a key difference in John's vision that the Twelve Apostles' names were written on the foundations.

48:35 **the name of the city.** The name of the city is *Yahweh shammah*, "The Lord is there."

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