



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

EZEKIEL

Week 1

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How to Use the CWR Bible Survey...

The book of Ezekiel is not considered by most Christians to be a staple of their Bible reading and study. And no wonder. Many of those who have set for themselves the goal of reading the entire Bible are perplexed when they come to Ezekiel. They may dutifully read through the book, wonder about the strange visions and bizarre actions of this prophet, then continue on through the Bible in the hope of finding something more relevant and easier to understand.

Yet the approach God takes through the prophet Ezekiel may be more in tune with the 21st century than first meets the eye. Consider these elements of Ezekiel's ministry that are applicable today.

Reaching a disinterested audience. Ezekiel was sent to bring God's message to the Jewish exiles in Babylonia. At the time, there was probably no more jaded audience. They had been uprooted, moved to a new land and were settling into a survival mode. What other misfortune could happen to them? Ezekiel was told by God that they wouldn't pay a whole lot of attention to him.

Profusely illustrated. The book of Ezekiel is one of the most visual books of the Bible. God conveys his message through the prophet by numerous parables and visions, rich with detail, metaphor and symbolism. The book of Ezekiel is thus an incredible and fascinating study of the shortcomings of those who insist on stripping the Bible of all stories, narratives, symbols, metaphors and poetry in a flawed attempt to read it "literally."

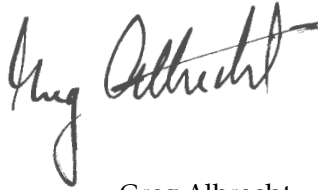
Highly dramatic. In no less than ten one-man plays, Ezekiel acts out God's messages. Some of these consisted of a single element of performance art, such as joining two sticks

together. Others are more elaborate.

Like Ezekiel's audience, people today are jaded and apathetic. They respond only to eye-popping graphics and dramatic presentations. As you read through this ancient book, notice the way God uses these "modern" elements to reach his people, then and now.

One of the most important messages that God brings through Ezekiel is that of individual responsibility. The people of Ezekiel's day had a strong sense of group identity—so much so that they did not see themselves as accountable for individual sin. Earlier prophets had emphasized national sin, and God had punished Israel as a nation. But Ezekiel states that "the soul that sins shall die" (Eze 18:20). You are responsible for your own relationship with God. Membership, or lack thereof, in a religious institution is no substitute for your relationship with God.

These words of Ezekiel help prepare the foundation for the coming of Jesus, whose atoning work saves each of his children, individually.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Greg Albrecht". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Greg Albrecht
President, Plain Truth Ministries

How to Use the CWR Bible Survey...

1—Read and study at your own pace. This is a devotional. It is designed to help you consider and ponder the great truths of God’s written revelation. It is designed to help you worship and come to know God. We plan to cover the entire Bible in 43 volumes, and while that sounds like a long time, don’t be in a hurry. Take your time! Even though each volume is divided into bite-size daily lessons, you may want to take two days on each “daily” lesson.

2—We suggest you set aside a special time for the *CWR Bible Survey* every day. We recommend allowing 30-45 minutes, but even if you can only spare 15 minutes, try to make it part of your regular schedule. You will find that the *CWR Bible Survey* will be an invaluable resource for facing your daily challenges.

3—You will need a good Bible. This might be an excellent time for you to consider purchasing a study Bible. Plain Truth Ministries has reviewed many of the study Bibles that are available, and in cooperation with Thomas Nelson and Zondervan, we are pleased to be able to offer two superb study Bibles that will be an excellent resource and help to you. Please see the back pages of this book for more details.

4—Always read the assigned passage of the daily lesson in your Bible first. Each daily lesson builds upon the portion of the Bible being covered that day. You may want to begin by praying about what God has in store for you as you read, and then look at the questions and background information.

5—Consider the format of each daily lesson. Almost every daily lesson will include:

- **Opening Up to the Word** —a section designed to help you open your mind to the teaching God has inspired.
- **Digging Into the Word**—this section will encourage you to get your nose into the Bible and think deeply about what it says.
- **Living Out the Word**—here you will be challenged to consider the practical implications for your life. How does this passage help you live?

• **Window On the Word**—will offer key insights to help you more clearly understand the daily Bible passage.

6—After you finish the daily lesson, take some quiet time. You may simply think, look out the window, take a walk, or even get down on your knees. But use this time to let this daily lesson sink in. Ask God to show you what he wants you to understand from your reading and study.

7—Consider the *CWR Bible Survey* for small groups in which you may be involved. Tell your friends about it. If you are involved in a small group that meets for prayer and Bible study, introduce your group to it. Many are seeking an easy-to-read guide to help them understand the Bible and to help them know God. The *CWR Bible Survey* can do that!

• **Abbreviations Used in the *CWR Bible Survey***—

Genesis	Ge	Nahum	Na
Exodus	Ex	Habakkuk	Hab
Leviticus	Lev	Zephaniah	Zep
Numbers	Nu	Haggai	Hag
Deuteronomy	Dt	Zechariah	Zec
Joshua	Jos	Malachi	Mal
Judges	Jdg	Matthew	Mt
Ruth	Ru	Mark	Mk
1 Samuel	1Sa	Luke	Lk
2 Samuel	2Sa	John	Jn
1 Kings	1Ki	Acts	Ac
2 Kings	2Ki	Romans	Ro
1 Chronicles	1Ch	1 Corinthians	1Co
2 Chronicles	2Ch	2 Corinthians	2Co
Ezra	Ezr	Galatians	Gal
Nehemiah	Ne	Ephesians	Eph
Esther	Est	Philippians	Php
Job	Job	Colossians	Col
Psalms	Ps	1 Thessalonians	1Th
Proverbs	Pr	2 Thessalonians	2Th
Ecclesiastes	Ecc	1 Timothy	1Ti
Song of Songs	SS	2 Timothy	2Ti
Isaiah	Isa	Titus	Tit
Jeremiah	Jer	Philemon	Phm
Lamentations	La	Hebrews	Heb
Ezekiel	Eze	James	Jas
Daniel	Da	1 Peter	1Pe
Hosea	Hos	2 Peter	2Pe
Joel	Joel	1 John	1Jn
Amos	Am	2 John	2Jn
Obadiah	Ob	3 John	3Jn
Jonah	Jnh	Jude	Jude
Micah	Mic	Revelation	Rev

EZEKIEL

Future Glories
of the Kingdom

Introduction to Ezekiel

Authorship: This book was written by the prophet Ezekiel, whose name means “God will strengthen,” or “God will harden.” Ezekiel was also a priest, like the prophets Jeremiah (Jer 1:1) and Zechariah (Zec 1:1). All three of these prophet-priests prophesied during the post-exilic period.

Ezekiel’s priestly background helps to explain his emphasis on the Temple, the glory of the Lord, the actions of Jerusalem’s priests and God’s future Temple.

Date: Ezekiel lived in the 7th and 8th centuries B.C. He received his commission as a prophet at the age of 30, the same age he would have been qualified to enter the priesthood. He was taken to Babylon with the deportation of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. Because of the detailed dates found in the book of Ezekiel, we can be relatively certain his ministry lasted from 593 to 571 B.C.

Setting and purpose: Judah, near the end of her independence, was vacillating between relying on Egypt for protection from Babylon, and relying on Babylon for protection from Egypt. When King Josiah died, first Egypt and then Babylon gained power over Judah. In 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar plundered Jerusalem, deporting King Jehoiachin and many others to Babylon. Ezekiel was included in this group and lived at Tel-Abib beside the river Kebar with many of the exiles.

Meanwhile, Nebuchadnezzar placed Zedekiah on the throne of Judah. When Zedekiah rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and destroyed it in 586 B.C. (2Ki 23:28–25:30; 2Ch 35:20–36:23). Egypt, Israel’s ally, was also invaded by the Babylonians, showing the futility of Israel’s dependence on foreign powers to protect her.

Before the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel’s message focused on Judah’s coming destruction because of her unfaithfulness to God and her idolatry. Afterward, his message changed and centered on Judah’s future restoration.

For the average reader, Ezekiel is at first a confusing series of

visions that are difficult to interpret. For this reason many people shy away from studying the book of Ezekiel. Yet it is a most interesting book, for these visions contain wonderful spiritual insight and value. Here we read of the vision of the valley of dry bones, and here we read beautiful and figurative language about Israel's future restoration.

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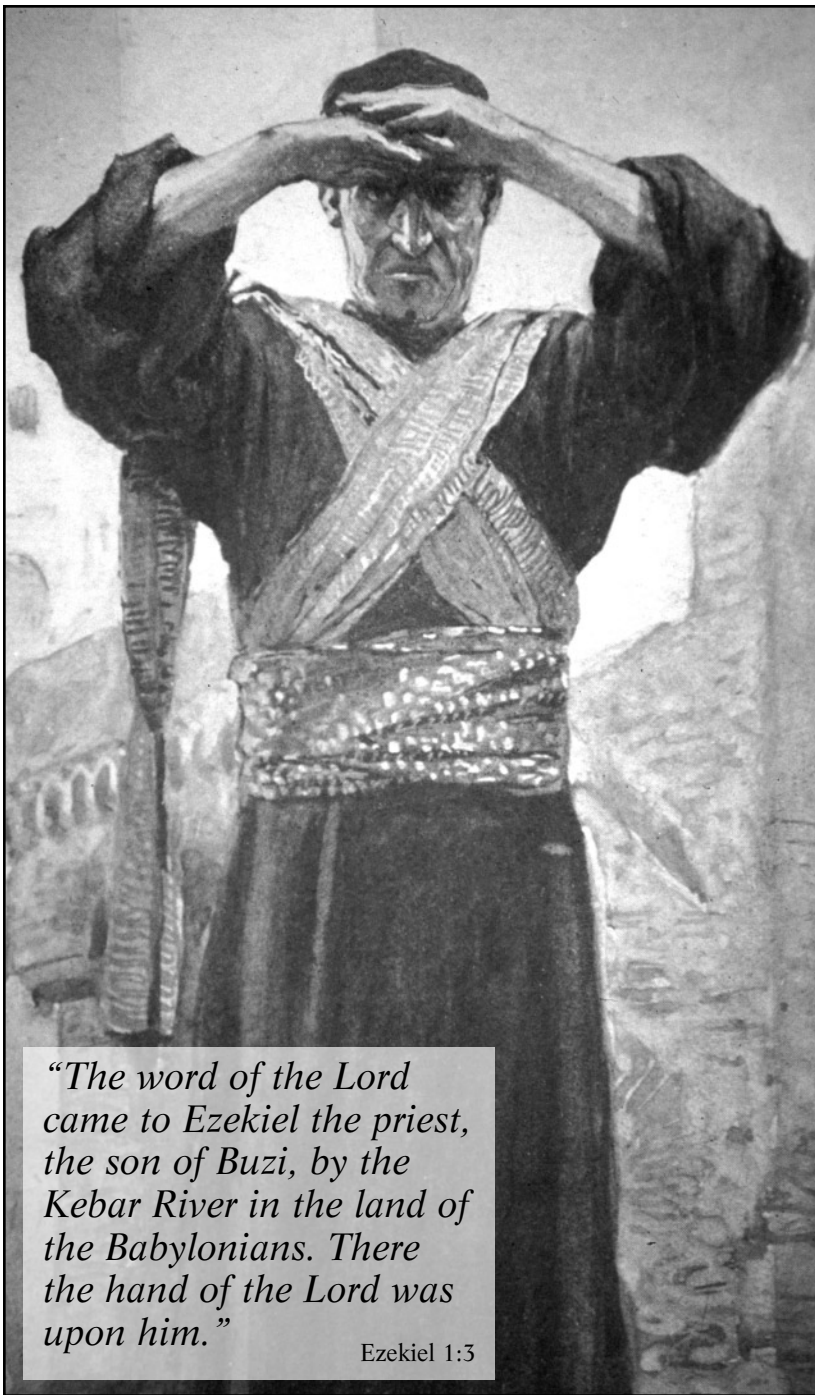
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“The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the Lord was upon him.”

Ezekiel 1:3

Vision of Glory

DAY 1

Ezekiel 1

When people talk about *visions* they have received from the Lord, do you tend to believe: (a) without reservation, (b) harbor some skepticism, (c) remain open-minded. Are differing definitions used to define “vision”?

1. When you think God’s glory, how does it compare to the pictures Ezekiel paints in this chapter?
2. What situation and location was Ezekiel in when he received this vision (v. 1)? How old was he? What was his vocation before he was a prophet (v. 3)?
3. What did Ezekiel see on the ground beside each creature (v. 15) and what might these symbolic objects represent about God’s nature?

1. Recall three pictures or ideas you’ve always had in your mind that represent God to you. How do you feel your understanding of God has been enhanced and enlarged by Jesus?
2. Would you like to have received the kind of vision Ezekiel received of God’s glory?
3. How do you think seeing an image of the glory of God, as Ezekiel did, might change your life? Do you feel that Jesus, the express image and exact representation of Father God (Hebrews 1:3) is, in a New Testament sense, even more life changing?

“In the thirtieth year” (v. 1). Many scholars believe this refers to Ezekiel’s age, which would have been the age at which he could enter the Lord’s service as a priest. Apparently God commissioned Ezekiel as a prophet and priest at the same time. Jeremiah and Zechariah were also prophet-priests. *“Exiles by the Kebar River”* (v. 1) refers to a Jewish settlement in Babylon where Ezekiel had been taken with King Jehoiachin and other captives. *“Four living creatures”* (v. 5) are four cherubim, holy angels who have special access to God and bear his throne-chariot (Eze 10).

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

God's Hard-Headed Prophet

Ezekiel 2–3

OPENING
up to the Word

It takes courage to deliver unpopular news. When was the last time you had to be a harbinger of bad news?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Why do you think God tells Ezekiel three times not to be afraid (2:6)?
2. What does God command Ezekiel to do with the scroll (3:1)? What do you think this might symbolize?
3. Even though the scroll contained judgment, Ezekiel says the scroll tasted as sweet as honey (v. 3). How is a message from God wonderful, even when it brings our own failings to light?
4. Who was Ezekiel *not* being sent to, and why should that have made his task easier (vs. 5-6)?

LIVING
out the Word

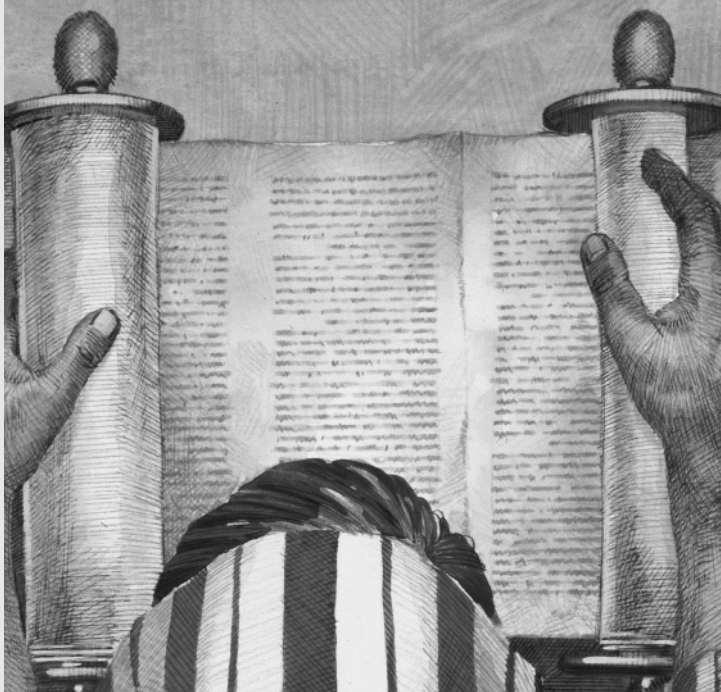
1. Do you consider yourself hardheaded or stubborn?
2. List three things that you are proud to be stubborn about, and three things you wish you weren't so stubborn about.
3. God made Ezekiel “unyielding and hardened” (2:8) in his commitment to serve. In what way would you like God to make you “hard-headed”? Where do you feel the weakest?

WINDOW
on the Word

Watchmen (3:17) were stationed on city walls, hilltops and special towers to keep an eye out for enemies. The advanced warning would give everyone time to seek protection. This is what God was calling Ezekiel to do for Israel—to warn them of their impending danger, and give them time to seek safety in God. **“I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth”** (2:26). Apparently God would cause Ezekiel to be temporarily unable to speak at various times, as a sign of Israel's sin.

“Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.”

Ezekiel 2:9-10



DAY 3

Divine Visual Aids

Ezekiel 4–5

OPENING
up to the Word

They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. Can you remember a powerful picture you've seen, and what it communicated to you?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What kind of a visual aid did God instruct Ezekiel to display to the people of Judah (4:1-2)?
2. How long was Ezekiel to lie on his side, and what did that action represent for Judah (vs. 4-9)?
3. What did Ezekiel balk at doing and why (vs. 9-14)? How did God respond to Ezekiel's concern (v. 15)?
4. Ezekiel was told to cut his hair, divide it into three piles and destroy it (5:1-4, 12). What would this signify to the inhabitants of besieged Jerusalem?
5. Judah's immoral and idolatrous activity was so bad that she is accused of being "more unruly" than the pagan nations around her (v. 7). Have you known someone who seemed to be a Christian yet they "gave God a bad name"?

LIVING
out the Word

1. God presents many visual aids and pictures in the Bible that convey important truth. What is your favorite picture and why?
2. When you speak with other people about your relationship with Christ, do you ever use biblical pictures or visual aids?

WINDOW
on the Word

"390 days...40 days" (4:4-6). There is a great deal of uncertainty surrounding these days and what they represent. Each day represents one year in the life of Israel and Judah, but do they represent years past, or future? If in the past, they probably refer to the years of Israel and Judah's sin. If future, the number of years they would be oppressed by gentiles after their defeat by the Babylonians. In some way the length of the siege corresponded to the years of Judah and Israel's sin.

“After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year.”

Ezekiel 4:6



Bad News!

Ezekiel 6-7

OPENING
up to the Word

When was the last time you heard really bad news?
Was it expected, or did it catch you by surprise?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Judah was being judged for her idolatry, and learning at the same time that her idols were powerless to save her. What can we learn about trusting in things to save us?

2. Where would the slain bodies of the citizens of Judah be laid (6:4-6), and what was God communicating by that act?

3. Some who managed to escape the terrible battle and were taken captive and sent to Babylon experienced new feelings. What were these new feelings (vs. 8-10)?

4. In each of these promised judgments God is emphasizing a single truth. Read the following verses to learn that lesson (6:7, 10, 13-14; 7:4, 9, 27). How might God be trying to teach you and me the same lesson?

LIVING
out the Word

1. How do you typically respond to bad news? (a) with calmness, (b) with anxiety, (c) with panic, (d) with denial.

2. All of us have had to face the reality of our own sin. What is the hardest news you ever had to hear about yourself? How did you ultimately respond to that bad news?

Do You See What I See?

DAY 5

Ezekiel 8–9

When a secret about a celebrity is revealed, what we learn is often shocking. What recent revelation has shocked you the most, and why?

1. Ezekiel is visited, like the Charles Dickens character Ebenezer Scrooge, by an amazing being (8:2). Who do you think this person might be? Compare this description with the one found in 1:27-28 before you make your guess. (a) an angel (b) a theophany (an appearance of God in human form).

2. Ezekiel was in Babylon when he had this vision from God. Where did God take Ezekiel in spirit (9:3)?

3. What did “putting the branch to their nose” (v. 17) signify?

4. In this amazing scene, a man clothed in linen appears with a writing kit (v. 2). What does God instruct him to do with this kit (vs. 3-4) and what will this accomplish (vs. 5-6)?

1. Do you have a secret that would shock others if it were revealed? What does God tell us about the secrets we keep (Heb 4:13, Lk 8:17)?

2. Have you ever had a secret that you wished others knew about? How did your secret cause you to suffer?

*“The idol that provokes to jealousy” (8:3) is not named, but could have been Asherah, the Canaanite goddess of fertility. Years earlier King Manasseh had put an image of Asherah in the Temple of God (2Ki 21:7), which he later removed (2Ch 33:13, 15). But someone put it back again until King Josiah removed it (2Ki 23:6). **Tammuz** (Eze 8:14) is the Hebrew term for Dumuzi, the Sumerian god of vegetation. This worship involved fertility rites. The phrase **“putting the branch to their nose”** (v. 17) causes confusion since no such ritual is known historically. It seems obvious that in some way it refers to an act of ritual idolatry that greatly displeased God.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

DAY 6

Good-bye Seems To Be the Hardest Word

Ezekiel 10–11

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you ever had to distance yourself from someone you once loved, or even leave them entirely, because your lifestyles or moral values were no longer compatible?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Why does Ezekiel see again what he had seen in chapter 1 (10:3-5, 15)?
2. In verses 18-19 we read that the glory of the Lord departed from the Temple. Why?
3. Judah's evil leaders did not believe Ezekiel's message of impending doom. What was their attitude (11:3)? How does God answer their claim (v. 11)?
4. What do you think caused the sudden death of Pelatiah during Ezekiel's prophecy (vs. 1-3, 13)?
5. One day God promised to bring back all the scattered remnants of Israel (v. 17), but what essential change would God make in them (vs. 19-20)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. Have you ever experienced your faith in God weakening, and as a result, your moral integrity suffering? (a) yes, once; (b) yes, several times; (c) yes, frequently; (c) no, never.
2. God has promised never to leave us, even when we fail him. But how does sin affect your relationship with God?

WINDOW
on the Word

Cooking pot...meat (11:3). *This false image of security was meant to envision meat safely inside a pot, just as Jerusalem felt safe behind her fortified walls.*

God With Us

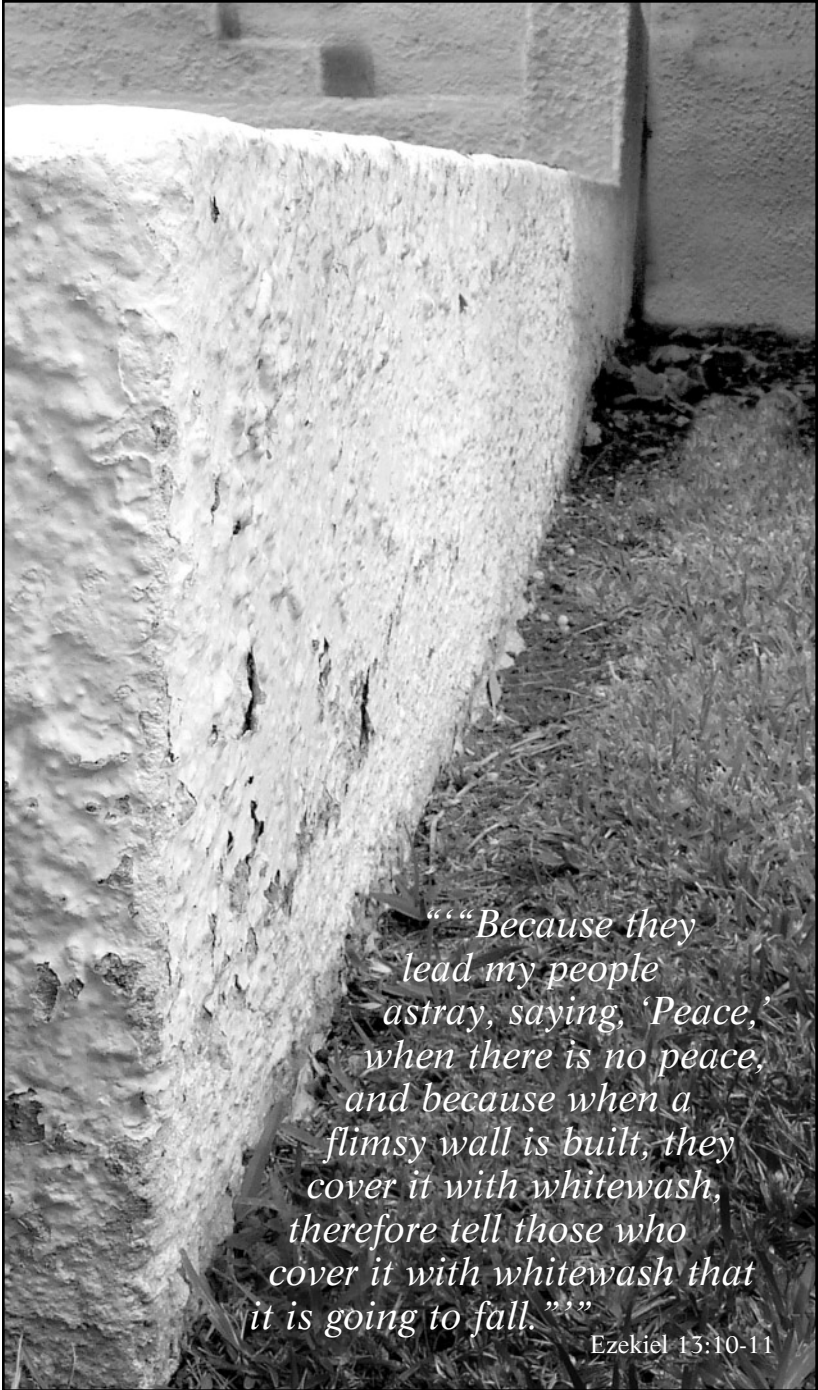
God is with his people wherever they are. Ezekiel delivered this message to the Jews exiled in Babylonia. They were in a strange land, far from the Temple at Jerusalem. While the Temple was regarded as God's dwelling, God was reminding the Israelites that he was present everywhere.

Later, when the Jews were dispersed around the world, and the Temple was destroyed, they would also feel a sense of isolation. Yet God assures them that he would always be their sanctuary.

When we find ourselves feeling alone among people who do not share our belief in God, it is important to remember this message—the Lord is with us wherever we go. He is always there for us to call on.

Centuries after Ezekiel's ministry, Jesus would come to live with us as a human being. When he returned to heaven, he promised to continue living with his each one of his followers through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

His words are still true—"I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:20).



*““Because they
lead my people
astray, saying, ‘Peace,’
when there is no peace,
and because when a
flimsy wall is built, they
cover it with whitewash,
therefore tell those who
cover it with whitewash that
it is going to fall.””*

Ezekiel 13:10-11

Warnings of Falling Prophets

DAY 7

Ezekiel 12–13

Conventional wisdom is a popular phrase today, revealing our culture's current thoughts on some issue. Can you think of a recent example of conventional wisdom being wrong or unreliable?

1. God asked Ezekiel to role-play a certain situation to symbolize what would happen to Judah. What part did God ask him to play (12:3-6)?
2. Whose future action was Ezekiel imitating (v. 10)?
3. What popular saying or proverb did God want Ezekiel to put an end to and why (vs. 22-25)?
4. How did God characterize the false prophets in Ezekiel's day (13:2-7)? Do you think God would have the same message for the false prophets of today?
5. What were the false prophets covering the truth with (vs. 10-16)? How are false prophets today whitewashing the gospel of Jesus Christ?

1. Do you feel that false prophets have ever negatively influenced you? What was it that made them so persuasive, and how did you finally see the truth?
2. What kind of damage did the lies do to your life? (a) slight, (b) more serious, (c) very serious, (d) irreparable.

*"The prince in Jerusalem" (12:10) was King Zedekiah. After a futile attempt to escape in 586 B.C. from the Babylonian attack, Zedekiah was taken to King Nebuchadnezzar, who forced Zedekiah to watch the murder of his own sons. He was then blinded and taken to Babylon, where he spent the remainder of his life. **Whitewash** (13:10) was a white paste used to cover the rocks on the walls of houses, hiding the uneven surfaces. Similarly, the false prophets were trying to whitewash the reality of the danger Judah faced.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word