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EZEKIEL

An 8-Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

WEEK 1 OF 8 • GENERAL / MIXED GROUP EDITION

The Heavens Were Opened — Ezekiel 1:1–3:27

Scripture Scope: Ezekiel 1:1–3:27 (ESV) • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

PARTICIPANT STUDY EDITION

Synchronized Section-by-Section with the Leader Guide Edition · Includes Group Reflection Workspace

Ezekiel — 8-Week Group Bible Study (Participant Study Edition)

Week 1: The Heavens Were Opened (Ezekiel 1:1–3:27)

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- **The prophet:** Ezekiel son of Buzi was a priest. In 597 BC he was taken to Babylon with King Jehoiachin and thousands of Jerusalem's leaders (2 Kings 24:10–16). In the fifth year of that exile (593 BC), by the Chebar canal, he received his call, and he prophesied for more than twenty years.
- **His setting:** While Jeremiah warned Jerusalem from inside the city, Ezekiel spoke to the exiles in Babylon, who hoped for a quick return home. Daniel, taken to Babylon a few years earlier, served in the king's court at the same time, and Ezekiel likely names him (14:14; 28:3).
- **The book's great arc:** God's glory is present, even in exile (1–3); the glory departs from the temple (8–11); judgment falls on Jerusalem (4–24) and the nations (25–32); the city falls and the watchman turns to hope (33); God promises a good shepherd, a new heart, and dry bones that live (34–39); a new temple is measured and the glory returns (40–48).
- **The structure:**
  - The call of the prophet (1–3).
  - Judgment on Jerusalem and Judah (4–24).
  - Words against the nations (25–32).
  - The watchman, the shepherd, and restoration (33–39).
  - The new temple and the renewed land (40–48).
- **Key refrain:** "They will know that I am the LORD," repeated more than sixty times.
- **Why it matters:** Ezekiel shows a God whose glory cannot be confined to one building or one land, whose holiness will not ignore sin, and whose grace promises what his people could never produce: a new heart, a new spirit, new life, and his own presence among them forever. The book ends with a city whose name is "The LORD Is There."

How This 8-Week Study Works

Designed for weekly small groups, mini-churches, and community gatherings (75–90 minutes per session) rather than daily homework checklists, this study follows Ezekiel's 48 chapters in eight weeks. Ezekiel is long, so each week reads a few focal passages closely and retells the chapters between them, following the book's great arc from glory present, to glory departing, to glory returning. Each week moves through six repeatable sections:

- **Section X.1 — Opening:** Sets the scene, the Week at a Glance, Head, Heart, and Hands objectives, the Opening Frame, and the Opening Entry Question.
- **Section X.2 — Historical & Literary Context:** Places the week's chapters inside the structure of Ezekiel and the ancient Near Eastern world.
- **Section X.3 — Movement 1:** The week's first guided passage: Guided Scripture Reading, Anchor Verses, Teaching Narrative, and Group Discussion Questions.
- **Section X.4 — Movement 2:** The week's second guided passage, following the same flow.
- **Section X.5 — Canonical Horizon:** Traces how the passage echoes across Scripture and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

- **Section X.6 — Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer:** Moves the week's study into everyday life, previews next week, and closes in prayer.

Key anchor verses are printed in each section for quick reference. Longer focal passages are read aloud together from the ESV.

Choosing a Bible Translation: Top 5 Translations Compared

Every English Bible translation falls along a spectrum between two primary approaches: word-for-word translation (formal equivalence, which prioritizes literal accuracy to the original phrasing and sentence structure) and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes immediate modern readability by translating idioms and ideas into natural contemporary expressions). Here is how five widely used English translations compare:

- **ESV (English Standard Version) — Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Follows the wording and sentence structure of the original Hebrew and Greek closely while using modern English; well suited to close study.
  - Cons: Because it tracks the original sentence structure, some phrasing can feel more formal than everyday speech.
- **NIV (New International Version) — Balanced (Between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought)**
  - Pros: Widely read; balances accuracy to the original languages with natural, everyday readability.
  - Cons: Because some idioms are rendered as modern expressions, a few literal wordplays or technical terms can be less visible.
- **NLT (New Living Translation) — Thought-for-Thought**
  - Pros: Warm and conversational; reads smoothly aloud and helps readers follow the big picture of long passages.
  - Cons: Because it prioritizes meaning over literal phrasing, it can be harder to use for close word study.
- **CSB (Christian Standard Bible) — Optimal Equivalence (Balanced)**
  - Pros: Stays close to the original words where possible while smoothing awkward phrasing into natural modern English.
  - Cons: Because it is a newer translation, some well-known verses may sound different from the wording many readers remember.
- **KJV / NKJV (King James Version & New King James Version) — Traditional Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Historic cadence that shaped English literature and church history; the NKJV updates archaic pronouns ("thee/thou") while keeping the classic rhythm.
  - Cons: Often reads like older English poetry, with complex sentences and archaic or formal vocabulary that can be harder for modern readers to follow.

This study quotes the ESV.

Greg & Kayla's Recommended Study Bibles

Having a trusted study Bible on hand is one of the best ways to go deeper as you read through Ezekiel:

- **Greg's Favorite Study Bible:** The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV), which contains extensive explanatory notes beneath almost every verse, ideal for detailed study.
- **Kayla's Favorite Study Bible:** The ESV Study Bible, containing over 20,000 study notes, articles, and explanations.

The 8-Week Ezekiel Study at a Glance

Week	Title & Passage	Movement 1 / Movement 2	Canonical Horizon
1	**The Heavens Were Opened** (1:1–3:27)	The Vision of God's Glory (1:1–28) / The Scroll and the Watchman (2:1–3:27)	The glory of God in the face of Christ; the Son of Man
2	**The Glory Departs** (4:1–11:25)	Signs of the Coming Siege (4:1–7:27) / Abominations and the Departing Glory (8:1–11:25)	The glory returns in Jesus; the people God marks as his own
3	**Judgment on a Rebellious House** (12:1–24:27)	False Hopes and Faithless Covenant (12:1–17:24) / Turn and Live, and the Fall Announced (18:1–24:27)	The God who wants the wicked to live; Christ who stood in the breach
4	**The City Has Fallen** (25:1–33:33)	The Nations Will Know (25:1–32:32) / The Watchman and the News of the Fall (33:1–33)	Christ the King over the nations; the watchman's message of life
5	**A New Heart** (34:1–36:38)	The Good Shepherd (34:1–31) / A New Heart and a New Spirit (35:1–36:38)	Jesus the Good Shepherd; the new heart by the Spirit
6	**Dry Bones Live** (37:1–39:29)	Can These Bones Live? (37:1–28) / Gog and the God Who Defends His People (38:1–39:29)	The Spirit who gives life; the resurrection
7	**The Glory Returns** (40:1–44:31)	Measuring the New Temple (40:1–42:20) / The Glory Returns to the House (43:1–44:31)	Jesus the true temple
8	**The LORD Is There** (45:1–48:35)	Worship and Land Renewed (45:1–46:24) / The River and the City: The LORD Is There (47:1–48:35)	The river of life and the city where God dwells

WEEK 1 OF 8

WEEK 1 SESSION GUIDE · EZEKIEL 1:1–3:27

Week 1: The Heavens Were Opened

Scripture Scope: Ezekiel 1:1–3:27 (ESV) • Focal Passages: Ezekiel 1:1–5; 1:22–28; 2:1–3:3; 3:10–21 • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

Section 1.1

Opening: The Heavens Were Opened (Ezekiel 1:1–3:27)

Passage **Ezekiel 1:1–3:27**

Opening

A young priest sits among exiles beside a canal in Babylon, hundreds of miles from the temple he was trained to serve. He is likely thirty, the age a priest would begin his service, but there is no temple here, only a foreign land and a people who hope to go home soon. Then the heavens open. A storm rolls in from the north, full of fire and brightness. Four living creatures move with wheels full of eyes, and above them, on a throne like sapphire, sits a figure like a man, gleaming with fire and surrounded by brightness like a rainbow.

It is the glory of the LORD, and Ezekiel falls on his face. A voice calls him "son of man," the Spirit sets him on his feet, and God sends him to a rebellious people, whether they listen or not. He eats a scroll of lament that tastes as sweet as honey, sits overwhelmed for seven days, and is appointed a watchman to warn God's people.

Week 1 At a Glance

Scripture Scope	Ezekiel 1:1–3:27 (the opened heavens by the Chebar canal, the living creatures and wheels, the throne and the glory of the LORD, the commission to a rebellious house, the scroll, the hard forehead, seven overwhelmed days, the watchman, and the prophet made mute)
Focal Passages	Ezekiel 1:1–5; 1:22–28; 2:1–3:3; 3:10–21
Literary & Structural Anchor	Ezekiel dates his visions precisely and piles up words like "likeness" and "appearance" because God's glory can be truly seen but never fully described. The Spirit moves the creatures, enters the prophet, and lifts him. God calls Ezekiel "son of man," stressing that he is a mortal standing before glory. The week sets the first point of the book's arc: God's glory is present, even in Babylon.
Big Idea	The glorious God is not confined to one place; he meets his people in exile and sends a faithful messenger with his word.

Week 1 Learning Objectives (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	**Know the Glory:** Learn the setting of Ezekiel's call, the meaning of the vision of God's glory, and the watchman's task.
HEART	**Behold Christ:** See that the glory Ezekiel glimpsed shines in the face of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.
HANDS	**Speak Faithfully:** Take one step to receive God's word in your heart and to speak it faithfully, leaving the results to God.

Opening Frame: The Heavens Were Opened

Lamentations left us in the ruins of Jerusalem, grieving and asking whether God had utterly rejected his people. Ezekiel answers from an unexpected place: not from the rubble of the temple but from a canal in Babylon, where the heavens open and the glory of God appears to exiles. Ezekiel was a priest taken to Babylon with King Jehoiachin, years before Jerusalem fell. His book follows a great arc: the glory present, the glory departing, and the glory returning. This is an 8–week study; each week we will read a few focal passages closely and hear the chapters between them retold. The question for this week: what does it mean that God meets his people even in exile? Before we read together, take a moment to share with the group:

Opening Entry Question (Icebreaker)

1.1 Q1 (Opening Entry Question): Describe a sight, such as a storm, a mountain, or a night sky, that was too big for words to capture.

Section 1.2

Historical & Literary Context: Glory Among the Exiles (Ezekiel 1:1–3:27)

Passage **Ezekiel 1:1–3:27**

Entering the World of Glory Among the Exiles

1. Historical Background

In 597 BC Nebuchadnezzar took King Jehoiachin and thousands of Jerusalem's leaders to Babylon (2 Kings 24:10–16; 2 Chronicles 36:9–10). Ezekiel was among them. The exiles were settled in communities such as Tel-abib beside the Chebar, an irrigation canal in Babylonia. Jerusalem still stood, and many hoped to return soon; Jeremiah wrote to them to settle in for a long stay (Jeremiah 29).

2. Cultural Setting

Many ancient peoples tied their gods to a land and a temple. To lose the land seemed to mean losing God. Ezekiel sees the glory of the LORD in Babylon, far from Jerusalem. Babylonian palaces were guarded by colossal winged guardian figures (lamassu) combining human, bull or lion, and eagle features; Ezekiel's four-faced living creatures serve the true King on a mobile throne.

3. Literary Structure of Ezekiel 1:1–3:27

- **Heaven opened** (1:1–3)
- **The storm, the creatures, and the wheels** (1:4–21)
- **The expanse, the throne, and the glory** (1:22–28)
- **The commission** (2:1–7)
- **The scroll** (2:8–3:3)
- **The hard forehead** (3:4–11)
- **Lifted by the Spirit and overwhelmed** (3:12–15)
- **The watchman** (3:16–21)
- **Bound and mute** (3:22–27)

4. Key Themes

God's glory and sovereignty; the Spirit who empowers; a mortal messenger; a rebellious house; faithfulness without guaranteed results.

5. Theological Considerations

Ezekiel's careful words ("likeness," "appearance") guard God's holiness. He truly sees God's glory, yet he never claims to capture God himself.

6. Relevant Scholarly Insights

"The thirtieth year" (1:1) is most likely Ezekiel's age, the age at which priests began their service (Numbers 4:3). Cut off from the temple, he is commissioned as a prophet instead.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.2)

1.2 Q1: Many ancient people believed their gods stayed in their own land. What would it have meant for exiles in Babylon to see the glory of the LORD there?

1.2 Q2: Ezekiel was a priest trained for temple service, but he lived far from the temple. How might God use a season when our plans or roles are taken away?

1.2 Q3: Ezekiel keeps saying "likeness" and "appearance" when he describes what he saw. Why do you think he chose his words so carefully?

Section 1.3

Movement 1: The Vision of God's Glory (Ezekiel 1:1–28)

Passage **Ezekiel 1:1–28**

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Ezekiel 1:1–5** (focal passage) — In the thirtieth year, by the Chebar canal, the heavens open and Ezekiel sees visions of God; the hand of the LORD is on him; a stormy wind comes from the north, a great cloud with flashing fire, and in it the likeness of four living creatures.
- **Summary of Ezekiel 1:6–21** — Each creature has four faces (a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle) and four wings; they go straight forward wherever the Spirit goes; beside them are wheels, a wheel within a wheel, their rims full of eyes, moving with the creatures in every direction.
- **Reader 2: Ezekiel 1:22–28** (focal passage) — Over the creatures is an expanse shining like crystal; the sound of their wings is like many waters; above the expanse is the likeness of a throne like sapphire, and on it a likeness with a human appearance, gleaming like fire, with brightness like a rainbow all around: the likeness of the glory of the LORD; Ezekiel falls on his face and hears a voice.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Ezekiel 1:1:** In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.
>
> **Ezekiel 1:28:** Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Teaching Narrative: The Vision of God's Glory

1. Heaven Opened in Exile (Ezekiel 1:1–3)

A dated vision in a foreign land; the hand of the LORD is on Ezekiel.

2. The Storm and the Living Creatures (Ezekiel 1:4–14)

Fire, brightness, and four-faced creatures moving wherever the Spirit goes.

3. The Wheels (Ezekiel 1:15–21)

Retold briefly. Wheels full of eyes that move in every direction: God sees all and goes anywhere.

4. The Throne Above (Ezekiel 1:22–27)

The expanse, the sound of many waters, and a figure like a man on a throne.

5. The Likeness of the Glory (Ezekiel 1:28)

Ezekiel's careful words, and his response: face down, listening.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.3)

1.3 Q1: "The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God" (1:1). What does it mean to you that God revealed himself to Ezekiel in exile, far from the temple?

1.3 Q2: The creatures went "wherever the spirit would go" (1:12), and the wheels moved in every direction. What do these details suggest about God's power and presence?

1.3 Q3: The rims of the wheels were "full of eyes all around" (1:18). How does it comfort or challenge you that God sees everything?

1.3 Q4: Ezekiel saw "the likeness of the glory of the LORD" (1:28). What is the difference between seeing God's glory truly and understanding God completely?

1.3 Q5: "When I saw it, I fell on my face" (1:28). What does a right response to God's glory look like in our worship today?

Section 1.4

Movement 2: The Scroll and the Watchman (Ezekiel 2:1–3:27)

Passage Ezekiel 2:1–3:27

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Ezekiel 2:1–3:3** (focal passage) — God calls Ezekiel "son of man" and tells him to stand; the Spirit enters him and sets him on his feet; God sends him to rebellious Israel, whether they hear or refuse; he is not to fear them, though he lives among briers and scorpions; a hand holds out a scroll written on both sides with lamentation, mourning, and woe; Ezekiel eats it, and it is as sweet as honey.
- **Summary of Ezekiel 3:4–9** — Foreign peoples would have listened, but Israel will not, for they have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart; God makes Ezekiel's forehead harder than flint.
- **Reader 2: Ezekiel 3:10–21** (focal passage) — God tells Ezekiel to receive his words in his heart; the Spirit lifts him, and he hears the sound of the glory; he goes in bitterness and sits overwhelmed among the exiles at Tel-abib for seven days; then God makes him a watchman for the house of Israel, responsible to warn the wicked and the righteous.
- **Summary of Ezekiel 3:22–27** — On the plain Ezekiel again sees the glory and falls on his face; he is to shut himself in his house, and God will make him mute, opening his mouth only when God has a word to speak.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

Ezekiel 2:3: And he said to me, “Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day.

Ezekiel 2:7: And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house.

Ezekiel 3:10: Moreover, he said to me, “Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears.

Ezekiel 3:17: “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.

Teaching Narrative: The Scroll and the Watchman

1. Son of Man, Stand Up (Ezekiel 2:1–2)

A mortal before glory, raised by the Spirit.

2. Sent to a Rebellious House (Ezekiel 2:3–7)

Speak whether they hear or refuse; do not be afraid.

3. The Scroll Eaten (Ezekiel 2:8–3:3)

Words of woe that taste sweet, because they are God's words.

4. Harder Than Flint (Ezekiel 3:4–9)

Retold briefly. God strengthens his servant against hard hearts.

5. Received and Overwhelmed (Ezekiel 3:10–15)

Taking God's words into the heart, and seven silent days among the exiles.

6. The Watchman (Ezekiel 3:16–21)

Warning the wicked and the righteous.

7. Bound and Mute (Ezekiel 3:22–27)

Retold briefly. The prophet speaks only when God speaks.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.4)

1.4 Q1: God called Ezekiel "son of man" and then "the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet" (2:2). How does God's Spirit enable weak people to do what he calls them to do?

1.4 Q2: "And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear" (2:7). How does this free us from measuring faithfulness by results?

1.4 Q3: The scroll was full of "lamentation and mourning and woe" (2:10), yet it was "as sweet as honey" (3:3) to Ezekiel. How can hard words from God still be sweet?

1.4 Q4: "All my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears" (3:10). Why does God want his word in Ezekiel's heart before it is in his mouth?

1.4 Q5: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel" (3:17). In what ways might God be calling you to lovingly warn or encourage someone?

Section 1.5

Canonical Horizon: The Glory of God in the Face of Christ, the Son of Man

Passage **Ezekiel 1:28**

Tracing the Thread Across Scripture

The figure with the likeness of a human being on the throne points to Jesus, the Son of Man, and the glory Ezekiel saw shines for us "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Turn to each passage as the connections are traced.

1. Glory in a Face (2 Corinthians 4:6; John 1:14)

The glory Ezekiel glimpsed as "a likeness with a human appearance" (1:26) shines in the face of Jesus Christ. The Word became flesh, and his glory was seen.

2. The Son of Man (Mark 10:45; 14:62; Daniel 7:13)

In Ezekiel, "son of man" (ben-'adam) highlights the prophet's mortal humanity before God's glory; Jesus' primary messianic title draws directly on Daniel 7:13's heavenly "one like a son of man," while sharing Ezekiel's emphasis on true humanity and humble service.

3. The Throne Seen Again (Revelation 4:2–8; 10:9–10)

John sees a throne, a rainbow, and four living creatures, and he eats a scroll that is sweet in the mouth and bitter in the stomach.

4. Spirit-empowered Witnesses (Acts 1:8; 20:26–27)

The Spirit who set Ezekiel on his feet empowers the church's witness. Paul, like a faithful watchman, declared the whole counsel of God.

5. God Not Bound to One Place (John 4:21–24)

Jesus says true worshipers will worship in spirit and truth, not only on one mountain or in one city.

Anchor Verse (ESV)

Ezekiel 1:28: Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.5)

1.5 Q1: Paul speaks of "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). How does Jesus show us the glory Ezekiel could only describe as a "likeness"?

1.5 Q2: Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). How does Jesus' use of "Son of Man"—rooted primarily in Daniel 7:13—differ from and deepen Ezekiel's ordinary human title "son of man"?

1.5 Q3: Paul told the Ephesian elders, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). How does the Spirit help believers today to speak God's word with courage?

Personal & Group Application (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	God's glory is not confined to one place; he met Ezekiel in exile, strengthened him by his Spirit, and made him a watchman to speak God's word whether people listened or not.
HEART	The glory Ezekiel glimpsed shines in the face of Jesus, the Son of Man who served and gave his life.
HANDS	Faith worships God with reverence, receives his word in the heart, and speaks it faithfully and lovingly, leaving the results to God.

Section 1.6

Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer

Application

Take a few minutes to move this week's study into everyday life. Discuss these three questions together and write down what you want to remember:

1.6 Q1: How does Ezekiel 1 reassure believers who feel disoriented or far from familiar rhythms that God's presence is not confined to one place? (Personal reflection may remain private.)

1.6 Q2: What steady habit helps a believer receive God's word thoughtfully into the heart before speaking to others? (Personal plans may remain private.)

1.6 Q3: How can believers speak God's word in truth and love while faithfully leaving the outcome to God rather than forcing results? (Personal application may remain private.)

Looking Ahead to Next Week

Recap: In Week 1, we saw the heavens opened in exile, the likeness of the glory of the LORD, and Ezekiel's call as a messenger and watchman to a rebellious house.

Transition: Next week Ezekiel acts out the siege of Jerusalem, is shown what is happening inside the temple, and watches the glory of the LORD leave the city.

Week 2 Overview — The Glory Departs (Ezekiel 4:1–11:25): Movement 1, Signs of the Coming Siege (4:1–7:27), covers Ezekiel's acted-out warnings and the announcement that the end has come. Movement 2, Abominations and the Departing Glory (8:1–11:25), covers the temple vision, the mark on the faithful, the glory leaving, and the promise of a new heart. The Canonical Horizon traces the glory returning in Jesus and the people God marks as his own.

Focal Readings to Preview

- Ezekiel 4:1–8
- Ezekiel 8:1–18
- Ezekiel 9:1–6
- Ezekiel 10:1–5, 18–19
- Ezekiel 11:14–25

My One Concrete Step for the Week Ahead

Write down or name aloud the specific rhythm, boundary, or conversation you want to practice before next week's gathering:

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting each person to share a one-sentence takeaway or prayer request, then pray together along these lines:

Closing Group Prayer

God of glory, your throne is above every throne, and you are present even in exile. Thank you that you speak to weak people and fill them with your Spirit. We pray for those who feel far from home or overwhelmed. We confess hard hearts that refuse to hear. Give us courage to speak your word in love, whether others listen or not. Thank you for Jesus, the Son of Man, in whose face your glory shines. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.