

# ASSURANCES<sup>FOR</sup> TROUBLING TIMES

*A study of Ezekiel's visions*

Small Group  
Leader's Guide

## SESSION ONE Exile And Us

### Lesson Summary

The prologue to the book of Ezekiel (vv.1:1-3) introduces us to the man Ezekiel and situates him in Babylon (modern Iraq) in the year 593 BCE when he, along with many of the leading citizens of Judah, have been taken into captivity. Here in pagan Babylon, God calls the former priest-in training to serve as a prophet to his fellow exiles. In America, as the Christian story continues to recede from public approval and knowledge, we, like Ezekiel and his countrymen, find ourselves, not pushed to geographical margins, but rather, as Carl Trueman noted, exiled to cultural irrelevance.

### Assigned Reading

This week, read and discuss **Ezekiel 1:1-3** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. What are some examples of how the Christian story has been disparaged in the 21st century? How have you yourself experienced this marginalization?
3. The Babylonian exiles suffered a crisis of faith because so much that was familiar to them was taken away during the exile. In what ways has our current cultural moment led to a crisis of faith among believers here in America?
4. The events of the first chapters of Ezekiel take place in and around 593 BCE, after the initial waves of exile, but before the fall of Jerusalem and the temple (in 586 BCE). What were some of the temptations faced by the exiles during this in-between period? Do we face the same sorts of temptations today?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer.

Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Ezekiel 1-3** (with particular focus on chapter 1).

# ASSURANCES<sup>FOR</sup> TROUBLING TIMES

*A study of Ezekiel's visions*

Small Group  
Leader's Guide

## SESSION TWO

# Meeting God in Unexpected Places

### Lesson Summary

The account of Ezekiel's (the former priest-in-training) prophetic call continues in chapter 1 with a detailed description of his theophanic vision, the longest recorded in Scripture. Ezekiel's description of his inaugural vision is convoluted and full of redundancy, giving the impression that he was so overwhelmed by this experience that he was repeatedly grasping for words in his attempts to describe what he witnessed. He begins by describing a wind storm coming out of the north (v. 4). As the storm approaches, Ezekiel recognizes four humanoid composite creatures, each with four wings and four sets of faces. These creatures are attached to wheels within wheels that enable them to move in any direction without turning. As the prophet's eyes move upward, he recognizes that the four creatures are supporting a brilliant expanse on top of which sits a sapphire throne and from which a glorious form emanates. Realizing what he is seeing, Ezekiel falls down prostrate on his face, overwhelmed because he sees the glory of the LORD in the most unexpected of places.

### Assigned Reading

This week, read and discuss **Ezekiel 1** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. What sort of boxes are we tempted to put God in?
3. In what significant ways are our conceptions of God too small? How can Ezekiel's experience be an encouragement for us?
4. In what unexpected places or circumstances have you seen the glorious LORD appear and work?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer.

Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Ezekiel 8-11**.

# ASSURANCES FOR TROUBLING TIMES

*A study of Ezekiel's visions*

Small Group  
Leader's Guide

## SESSION THREE

# Not Meeting God in Expected Places

### Lesson Summary

The great temple vision of chapters 8-11, given some 13 months after Ezekiel's inaugural vision recorded in chapters 1-3, depicts the depths of idolatry present at the temple in Jerusalem. Worship of the LORD had devolved into an outward veneer; the reality was syncretistic worship of false gods. Through Ezekiel, we become eyewitnesses to the reasons for the destruction of the Temple, city, and nation. Not only has idolatry been committed, but a violent society has been created and tolerated (8:17). In this vision the significance of the wheels and wings from chapter 1 become clear as we witness the glory of the LORD incrementally leaving its temple dwelling until it rests on a mountain east of Jerusalem. Ezekiel's detailed description of both the idolatrous activity he witnessed during his visionary transport to Jerusalem (chapter 8) as well as the destruction of Jerusalem (chapters 9-10) serve to buttress his contention that the exiles must abandon their current attachment to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is no longer the symbol of the LORD's favor or his glorious residence but is a city teeming with idolatrous practices which will "drive me [the LORD] from my sanctuary" (8:6). At the end of the vision, Ezekiel repeats what he has seen to his fellow exiles, revealing to them the LORD is no longer to be found where they most expected to find him.

### Assigned Reading

This week, read and discuss **Ezekiel 10** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. We saw in Ezekiel 8 that misdirected, idolatrous worship was the problem with the Lord's people. What resources has the Lord given the Church to determine whether or not its worship is acceptable to him?
3. The Old Testament prophets often connected corrupt worship with societal breakdown (8:17) and, conversely, faithful worship of the Lord with societal transformation. (See Hosea 4:1-2, Amos 5, and Zechariah 7:8-14.) Why are worship of the Lord and treatment of others so closely aligned in Scripture?
4. In what ways is the incremental departure of the glory of the Lord both an act of judgment on the nation of Judah as well as an act of compassion?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer.

Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Ezekiel 37**.

# ASSURANCES FOR TROUBLING TIMES

*A study of Ezekiel's visions*

Small Group  
Leader's Guide

## SESSION FOUR

# Can These Bones Live?

### Lesson Summary

Ezekiel's third vision is recorded in chapter 37. Though no specific date for the vision is given, we know from its placement in the book, as well as its message of hope, that Ezekiel received this vision after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 586 BCE.

### Assigned Reading

This week, read and discuss **Ezekiel 37:1-14** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Are you or someone you know currently struggling with a personal circumstance so daunting that you/they are in danger of despair? How can the message of this passage help restore hope?
3. In Ezekiel's vision, the dry bones are revived only when the Lord breathes his Spirit (*ruach*) into them. So, too, the Church won't be successful without the Spirit. As professor Ed Clowney observed, "Apart from the spirit, the church can only be an institutional sepulcher organizing the bones of dead people." In other words, there can be lots of activity, lots of programs, but without the spirit there will be no revival, no life. In what ways is the Lord's Spirit currently working in your life and the life of Christ Church?
4. Not only does Ezekiel see a powerful vision of new life brought forth from death, but he himself becomes an agent in this fulfillment. Certainly, the Lord could have brought these corpses to life without Ezekiel. It is God's *ruach* who gives life, but Ezekiel himself is the instrument used. What does this mean for us today that the Lord uses the faithful obedience of his people to accomplish his work, including bringing the dead to life?
5. We stand, as Ezekiel did, in the midst of death all around and are confronted with the same burning question, "Christ Church, can these bones live?" Yes, death has been overcome and has lost its sting. He who raised you from death to life, can't He do the same for our families, our neighborhoods, our city? Can't he cause all the dry bones around us in our families, communities, and city to live at the sound of the Gospel? Do you believe these bones can live?
6. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Ezekiel 40-48**.

# ASSURANCES<sup>FOR</sup> TROUBLING TIMES

*A study of Ezekiel's visions*

Small Group  
Leader's Guide

## SESSION FIVE God Is With Us

### Lesson Summary

The book of Ezekiel ends as it began: with a vision. The final vision of a restored temple and city, recorded in these last nine chapters, encourages repentance from past sin, faithfulness in present difficulties, and hope for a future for the exilic community. Ezekiel employs images and concepts that were familiar to his fellow exiles, yet paints a fuller picture of the future than did their old covenant language. Whether one opts for a literal or figurative interpretation of the specifics of this vision, the emphases are clear: the Lord will return to dwell in the midst of his people, the Lord's Kingdom will expand, and his restored temple will transform the lives of all.

### Assigned Reading

This week, read and discuss **Ezekiel 43:1-12** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Christians have interpreted Ezekiel 40-48 in various ways. Which interpretation appeals to you and why?
3. Many scholars contend that what Ezekiel 40-48 prophesies in concrete earthly terms (complete with kitchen utensils) is described by Revelation 21-22 in eschatological terms: Ezekiel's vision finds its fulfillment in John's vision of New Jerusalem at the end of the ages. Do you find this comparison helpful or not? Explain your answer.
4. The book of Ezekiel ends with these words: "And the name of the city from that time on will be: THE LORD IS THERE" (48:35). How can the Immanuel Principle, the Lord's promise to be with his children, provide comfort and hope in troubling times?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week rereading and reflecting on **Ezekiel 43**.

# ASSURANCES FOR TROUBLING TIMES

*A study of Ezekiel's visions*

Small Group  
Leader's Guide

## SESSION SIX

# The Glory Of The LORD

### Lesson Summary

As we noted last week, the book of Ezekiel ends as it began: with a final vision of a restored temple and city with the glory of the Lord returning to the temple. Where is that glory today?

### Assigned Reading

This week, read and discuss **2 Corinthians 4** as a group. How does Paul's discussion of suffering and glory compare with that of Ezekiel?

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Can you think of any examples where you have witnessed this glory/suffering paradox of the present either in your own life or in the life of another believer?
3. How does the suffering/glory nexus cut against the grain of many popular conceptions of the successful Christian? How can we encourage one another to not be seduced by these misguided ideas?
4. According to 2 Tim 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Discuss ways in which the visions of Ezekiel can teach, rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness.
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage group members to read the entire book of Ezekiel!