



EZEKIEL + MARK

A 12-WEEK BIBLE READING PLAN

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REFLECTION PROMPTS BY JEFF HEIDKAMP

HEARING FROM GOD TOGETHER THROUGH SCRIPTURE

USING THIS READING GUIDE

This guide will take you through 12 weeks of Bible reading with five readings each week.

Each week, four of the five readings will be from the book of Mark, which tells the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. By the end of the 12 weeks, you will have read the entire book of Mark. With each reading we have included instructions for reflection based on the contemplative practice called Lectio Divina. You will notice they are the same instructions for each day. You can feel free to spend as much or as little time as you like on these exercises.

One of the five readings each will be from the book of Ezekiel. This reading will include some explanatory notes and questions for reflection. The entire text of the book of Ezekiel is not included in this reading guide. However, if you would like to read the entire book, we have included the chapters to read each week in order to finish all of Ezekiel in 12 weeks.

READING THE BOOK OF MARK

The book of Mark is one of four biographies of Jesus found in the New Testament. It is the earliest of the four biographies, with the other biographers borrowing from Mark. Mark is also the shortest, not commenting much on Jesus words and actions, rather recording them in compact, simple language.

One temptation when reading the Bible is to assume we already know what it means. Particularly in reading something like the life of Jesus, we might tend to project on to the text our assumptions about who Jesus is and what he is about.

One thing you will notice throughout the text is that Jesus constantly confounds the religious people that he encounters. If we take Jesus seriously, we will often find that he confounds us as well. Jesus does not enter our lives to confirm how we were already living, but instead to introduce us to the radical way of the Kingdom of God.

I encourage you to sit with these texts in all of their beauty and ambiguity. Let Jesus challenge your assumptions about God, the gospel, and life itself. Read prayerfully and expectantly, letting the Spirit make these ancient words alive for you in new ways.

READING THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

In some ways, Ezekiel might be one of the most difficult books in the Bible. It is full of strange images, confounding symbolism, and violent imagery. God's judgment in this book is so severe that it can be hard to read. At the same time, the message of Ezekiel is actually fairly simple. God's people have sinned, and are

being judged. Their only hope is to repent and place their hope in the mercy of God. If they do, God wants to pour his love on them.

The setting of the book of Ezekiel takes a bit of explaining. The people of Israel, after centuries of disobedience and idolatry, have been punished by God. They have been defeated by the armies of Babylon, and some of them have been taken into exile in Babylon. It is in Babylon where Ezekiel receives his call and prophecies. At times, the setting of the book changes as God gives Ezekiel visions of other places, such as Jerusalem.

Perhaps the most difficult question for 21st century Christians reading the book of Ezekiel is, “What do ancient judgments against the Israelites mean for us today?” In particular, we might wonder how the message of judgment fits with the God of mercy who is revealed in Christ’s death on the cross.

While there is no one single answer to these questions, here are four things to keep in mind as you read Ezekiel.

1. God is not passive about evil. Mercy should not be mistaken for apathy. When we look at the evil in the world around us, we can feel both sorrow and anger. In this way, we reflect God’s feelings about evil.
2. God does not totally abandon his people. Even when they are under judgment, he wants them to know he is still involved. It may seem odd, but even proclamations of judgment are a sign that God has not left his people alone.
3. Many readers have noted the extreme nature of the message of Ezekiel. One reason for this seems to be that a temptation of the God’s people is not simply to disobey God, but simply to ignore God. God is passionate to be involved with his people, even when they have rebelled against him.
4. The final word of Ezekiel is not judgment, but hope for God’s mercy. If you read the entire book, you will find that the horrors of the first part of the book are matched by a hope in the second part.

READING EZEKIEL 1:1-21

For those wanting to read the entire book of Ezekiel, read chapters 1-5.

On July 31 of my thirtieth year, while I was with the Judean exiles beside the Kebar River in Babylon, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.² This happened during the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s captivity.³ (The Lord gave this message to Ezekiel son of Buzi, a priest, beside the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians, and he felt the hand of the Lord take hold of him.)

⁴ As I looked, I saw a great storm coming from the north, driving before it a huge cloud that flashed with lightning and shone with brilliant light. There was fire inside the cloud, and in the middle of the fire glowed something like gleaming amber.⁵ From the center of the cloud came four living beings that looked human,⁶ except that each had four faces and four wings.⁷ Their legs were straight, and their feet had hooves like those of a calf and shone like burnished bronze.⁸ Under each of their four wings I could see human hands. So each of the four beings had four faces and four wings.⁹ The wings of each living being touched the wings of the beings beside it. Each one moved straight forward in any direction without turning around.

¹⁰ Each had a human face in the front, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle at the back.¹¹ Each had two pairs of outstretched wings—one pair stretched out to touch the wings of the living beings on either side of it, and the other pair covered its body.¹² They went in whatever direction the spirit chose, and they moved straight forward in any direction without turning around.

¹³ The living beings looked like bright coals of fire or brilliant torches, and lightning seemed to flash back and forth among them.¹⁴ And the living beings darted to and fro like flashes of lightning.

¹⁵ As I looked at these beings, I saw four wheels touching the ground beside them, one wheel belonging to each.¹⁶ The wheels sparkled as if made of beryl. All four wheels looked alike and were made the same; each wheel had a second wheel turning crosswise within it.¹⁷ The beings could move in any of the four directions they faced, without turning as they moved.¹⁸ The rims of the four wheels were tall and frightening, and they were covered with eyes all around.

¹⁹ When the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. When they flew upward, the wheels went up, too.²⁰ The spirit of the living beings was in the wheels. So wherever the spirit went, the wheels and the living beings also went.²¹ When the beings moved, the wheels moved. When the beings stopped, the wheels stopped. When the beings flew upward, the wheels rose up, for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels.

READING EZEKIEL 5:1-17

For those wanting to read all of Ezekiel, read chapters 16-20

“Son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a razor to shave your head and beard. Use a scale to weigh the hair into three equal parts. 2 Place a third of it at the center of your map of Jerusalem. After acting out the siege, burn it there. Scatter another third across your map and chop it with a sword. Scatter the last third to the wind, for I will scatter my people with the sword. 3 Keep just a bit of the hair and tie it up in your robe. 4 Then take some of these hairs out and throw them into the fire, burning them up. A fire will then spread from this remnant and destroy all of Israel.

5 “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: This is an illustration of what will happen to Jerusalem. I placed her at the center of the nations, 6 but she has rebelled against my regulations and decrees and has been even more wicked than the surrounding nations. She has refused to obey the regulations and decrees I gave her to follow.

7 “Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: You people have behaved worse than your neighbors and have refused to obey my decrees and regulations. You have not even lived up to the standards of the nations around you. 8 Therefore, I myself, the Sovereign Lord, am now your enemy. I will punish you publicly while all the nations watch. 9 Because of your detestable idols, I will punish you like I have never punished anyone before or ever will again. 10 Parents will eat their own children, and children will eat their parents. I will punish you and scatter to the winds the few who survive.

11 “As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, I will cut you off completely. I will show you no pity at all because you have defiled my Temple with your vile images and detestable sins. 12 A third of your people will die in the city from disease and famine. A third of them will be slaughtered by the enemy outside the city walls. And I will scatter a third to the winds, chasing them with my sword. 13 Then at last my anger will be spent, and I will be satisfied. And when my fury against them has subsided, all Israel will know that I, the Lord, have spoken to them in my jealous anger.

14 “So I will turn you into a ruin, a mockery in the eyes of the surrounding nations and to all who pass by. 15 You will become an object of mockery and taunting and horror. You will be a warning to all the nations around you. They will see what happens when the Lord punishes a nation in anger and rebukes it, says the Lord.

16 “I will shower you with the deadly arrows of famine to destroy you. The famine will become more and more severe until every crumb of food is gone. 17 And along with the famine, wild animals will attack you and rob you of your children. Disease and war will stalk your land, and I will bring the sword of the enemy against you. I, the Lord, have spoken!”

REFLECTION

Towards the end of the book of Ezekiel, we will find out that God also has a heart of mercy for his people. But before then, Ezekiel emphasizes very strongly Israel’s wickedness and God’s judgment.

What evils in the world, whether locally or globally, make you upset? When does injustice cause you the most anger? How do you think God feels about these injustices and evils?

Horizontal lines for reflection writing.

READING EZEKIEL 37:1-14

For those wanting to read all of Ezekiel, read chapters 40-43

The Lord took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the Lord to a valley filled with bones. 2 He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. 3 Then he asked me, "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?"

"O Sovereign Lord," I replied, "you alone know the answer to that."

4 Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord! 5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! 6 I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

7 So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. 8 Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.'"

10 So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army.

11 Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, 'We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished.' 12 Therefore, prophesy to them and say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the Lord. 14 I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the Lord has spoken!'"

REFLECTION

This is one of the most famous passages in Ezekiel. It reminds us of a previous biblical text - the creation of humanity from dust in Genesis 1-2. It also reminds us of the resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament, and of our future resurrection from the dead.

What experience have you had with the death of people you care about? Resurrection in this passage can be taken both literally and metaphorically. In what ways are you longing for resurrection power from God?

Horizontal lines for reflection writing.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

EZEKIEL

VIDEOS

thebibleproject.com/explore/ezekiel

COMMENTARY

The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit
by Christopher J. H. Wright

MARK

DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

Mark: Doubleday Bible Commentary by R.T. France

GROUP STUDY

Mark (N. T. Wright for Everyone Bible Study Guides)
by N. T. Wright

“GOING DEEPER” COMMENTARY

Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s
Story of Jesus by Ched Meyers

MERCY
VINEYARD CHURCH