

## Life Group Notes 6/30/2024

Pastor Mark Warren People of the Bible: Ezekiel

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[No doctrine is a given unless it has been found in the Word given by the Holy Spirit and received by you. If you have observations or questions, feel free to send me an email with your comment or observations at [tbeachhead@comcast.net](mailto:tbeachhead@comcast.net). Thank you for taking the time—Pete Mehegan, the Scribe.]

Remember: Be good to one another. Be sensitive and kind. Let God heal our hearts...and guide our discussions. **PLEASE PRE-READ THESE NOTES AND CHOOSE THE DIRECTION THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR GROUP.** BE COGNIZANT OF YOUR GROUP'S TIME AND BE SENSITIVE! **Some groups would like to dwell on a single idea. Let the Spirit be your guide. Never feel obligated to complete this study.**

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Note: I have highlighted suggested discussion questions that Pastor Mark has raised this week, 6/30. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to guide all our discussions, using the highlights as trail blazes. **The purpose is to minister to one another.** I include each of the passages mentioned in full, to facilitate the enjoyment of these notes. Footnotes are not meant to distract. This week's footnotes include:

1. [On prophets and prophecy.](#)
2. [On Ezekiel the prophet.](#)
3. [On Ezekiel the book.](#)
4. [On Ezekiel bread.](#)

\*\*\***Important:** At the very [end of these notes](#), I've included passages that were suggested by this week's message for deeper study using SOAP journaling to help further your study during the week. \*\*\*

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Pastor Mark began by speaking of the new technology that will be installed this week, including an "LED wall," that he hopes will enhance what we already have. "Yet," he says, "though this might attract some to come to our services, any Christian service is made attractive by those who attend...who radiate Christlikeness."

1. What did you think?
2. What first attracted you to Grace.
3. What made you want to be a member?
4. If you've been a member for a while, what has kept you?
5. Longtime members and co-workers at Grace, Kevin and Sylvia, moved on to a sister church in Concord, and we said goodbye to them. Why do people move on?

Pastor Mark opened the message with Hebrews 12: [14](#)Pursue peace with everyone, as well as holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. [15](#)See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God, and that no root of bitterness springs up to cause trouble and defile many.

1. What do you see?
2. Are these exhortations feasible?
3. How does one "...fall short of the grace of God?"

4. What is a root of bitterness? How does such a root prevent peace? How does it defile?

He continued, "Although I grow in my relationship with Christ daily, I am less confident in my ability to navigate the world in front of us. I don't know how you feel as we seek to project where we are going. I do think it is interesting, as things unfold, and I watch what transpires, that I end up grieved."

1. Are you able to talk about events around us without a root of bitterness springing up? Do you have any pointers?
2. How is the Lord telling you to prepare for what is ahead?
3. Have you lost friends over events, times and seasons? Have they returned over time? Was your response constructive?

Mark says, "The debate spoke to me of where we are as a nation. We were once a 'Nation Under God,' and we championed what was consistent with the scripture. We knew how to create a foundation with family at the center. And it seems like the foundations are crumbling?"

1. Do you see this?
2. What has changed since your childhood?
3. What remains?
4. Has anything improved? List what has improved.

He points out that the story of our nation, from the deliberate establishment of religious freedom in response to tyrannical repression, has changed throughout the centuries and eroded to what we see today. He says this is parallel to what the Bible describes as the cycles of the history of Israel. When the nation turned toward God in humility and obedience, the nation prospered and the enemies were kept at bay, but once Israel turned away from God, enemies were strengthened, and prosperity dissipated to ruin. "What we see is not new, but what concerns me is the question of whether or not we have become the proverbial cold-blooded frog in the pot of increasingly hot water.

1. What do you see?
2. What do you know of the biblical history of Israel? Why were they established?
3. Why were they expelled from the land?
4. Why were they restored?
5. Are we aware enough of the times that we are in?
6. What do you know of Ezekiel? (See [footnotes two](#) and [three below](#).)
7. How do we as followers of Jesus navigate the season that we're in?
8. Are you a fighter? Or are you one who removes himself from the chaos...like a hermit? Can you explain the nature of each?

Mark quoted from an article in the newsletter this week, asking how Christians can engage in politics. The main point says, "God's followers influence society not by changing systems, but by examining their own personal integrity and examining their individual relationship with Jesus."

1. How is this a good start? What happens when a society repents?
2. In the book of Jonah, what happened in Nineveh when the city turned to God? What did not happen because the city's repentance was real?

Mark compared the two contemporary prophets Ezekiel and Daniel. Like Ezekiel, Daniel was a young man transported to Babylon by the King of Babylon.

By his recognizable integrity and good behavior, Daniel rose up to become advisor and to use his influence with the King of Babylon, and subsequently to the kings of Media and Persia. Ezekiel, on the other hand, was used by God to influence the Jewish people in exile. Ezekiel 37 begins with Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones. Take a moment to look at the passage: *1The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by His Spirit and set me down in the middle of the valley, and it was full of bones. 2He led me all around among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, and indeed, they were very dry. 3Then He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones come to life?" "O Lord GOD," I replied, "only You know." 4And He said to me, "Prophecy concerning these bones and tell them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! 5This is what the Lord GOD says to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you will come to life. 6I will attach tendons to you and make flesh grow upon you and cover you with skin. I will put breath within you so that you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"*

*7So I prophesied as I had been commanded. And as I prophesied, there was suddenly a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8As I looked on, tendons appeared on them, flesh grew, and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them.*

*9Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and tell the breath that this is what the Lord GOD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, so that they may live!" 10So I prophesied as He had commanded me, and the breath entered them, and they came to life and stood on their feet—a vast army.*

*11Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Look, they are saying, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished; we are cut off.' 12Therefore prophecy and tell them that this is what the Lord GOD says: 'O My people, I will open your graves and bring you up from them, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13Then you, My people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14I will put My Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.'"*

1. What do you see?
2. God addresses Ezekiel as "Son of Man." Who else calls Himself the Son of Man?
3. In Hebrew, "Son of Man" is actually translated from the words *Ben Adam*, "Son of Adam." What implied authority do Adam's heirs carry with them, by virtue of lineage? See [footnote 2](#) below on Ezekiel the prophet.
4. Can dry bones live? Under what conditions?
5. Did God speak to the bones? Or did God pass to Ezekiel the script, telling him what to say?
6. How important were the words Ezekiel spoke? Why are our words so important?
7. Is this prophecy a forecast of the future? Or is it a promise to look forward to in faith and an exhortation to pray with added confidence?
8. Mark says, "Ezekiel spoke some harsh truths." List them.
9. Look at verse 11. Who is in despair? Who is being honest? Why is an honest assessment with a willingness to repent the precursor to God's intervention?
10. Describe the encouragement that God's Word brings.

11. What caused the dryness? What caused the bones to move and come together?
12. In God's instruction to Ezekiel, which came first? The breath/spirit or the tendons and flesh?
13. In the event itself, which actually came first? Can you explain this?
14. Pastor highlights a parallel to us today: We discern the harsh truths in the events around us, and we speak hope into these circumstances: words that restore life and a future. Explain.
15. He says, "Here is Ezekiel, standing firm in a foreign land. And here we are in a land increasingly foreign, and we have to stand firm." Why should we? What is our basis for hope?
16. "Our own society has moved in a way that is very foreign to us. So how do we navigate in this place that feels foreign?" What do you think?
17. Pastor Mark asks, "How do we maintain our relationship with God in a culture that continues to seek to resist His ways?" Answer Pastor Mark's question.

Mark points out that Ezekiel was not just a prophet in exile in Babylon, but he was one who listened to God, and he understood his calling. If we try to understand our own specific calling, and if we posture ourselves by saying, "God, use me the way you designed me," asking what His purpose for our lives is, we will see and hear the answer to these questions.

1. Do you have a testimony.
2. Look at Luke 1: [38](#) "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it happen to me according to your word." Then the angel left her. How did Mary follow Pastor Mark's advice?
3. Was there ambiguity in Mary's call? Did she know of her call before the angel appeared?
4. What was the result of Mary purposing to do what she was asked to do?
5. Whom do you bring with you wherever you go? Who is always with you?

**Pastor's point 1: Seeking regular communion with God.** Look at Ezekiel 1: [1](#) *In the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was among the exiles by the River Kebar, the heavens opened and I saw visions of God.* [2](#) *On the fifth day of the month—it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin—* [3](#) *the word of the LORD came directly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Kebar. And there the LORD's hand was upon him.*

1. What do you see? How detailed is the description of the event?
2. Is this description in the first person, "I, me, my," or in the third, "he, him, his"?
3. Like Mary's encounter with Gabriel at the well, this is Ezekiel's first encounter. Was this encounter expected?
4. How was Ezekiel prepared for this moment?
5. Ezekiel had been taken from his own country, and, against his will and without his permission, found himself on the banks of a foreign river with other exiles. What feelings do these circumstances evoke? Can you imagine this happening today?
6. Do you ever wake up in the morning and ask God for his plan for you for that day? Whom do you know that would wake up early every morning, go to a deserted place,

and seek God for His plan for Him in that day? What advantage did Jesus glean from this habit?

7. How active is God in your life? Could He be more active?
8. What steps can we take to allow Him to become more active?

**Pastor's point 2. Obedience to God's instructions.** When God speaks, are you willing to move in the direction in which He asks you to move? Pastor spoke of a conversation with a friend who was impassioned by a cause that was different from Mark's.

1. Has this happened to you before? Did a friend try to draw you into his passion?
2. Is it possible that two be impassioned by different drives?
3. Is it wrong not to be likewise impassioned? Is it right to criticize another's passions?
4. What passions unite us all as Christians? What passions have you seen that are important, but represent a call to individuals, and not to the whole body?

Now examine Ezekiel 4: [1](#) "Now you, son of man, take a brick, place it before you, and draw on it the city of Jerusalem. [2](#) Then lay siege against it: Construct a siege wall, build a ramp to it, set up camps against it, and place battering rams around it on all sides. [3](#) Then take an iron plate and set it up as an iron wall between yourself and the city. Turn your face toward it so that it is under siege, and besiege it. This will be a sign to the house of Israel.

[4](#) Then lie down on your left side and place the iniquity of the house of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their iniquity for the number of days you lie on your side. [5](#) For I have assigned to you 390 days, according to the number of years of their iniquity. So you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

[6](#) When you have completed these days, lie down again, but on your right side, and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah. I have assigned to you 40 days, a day for each year. [7](#) You must turn your face toward the siege of Jerusalem with your arm bared, and prophesy against it.

[8](#) Now behold, I will tie you up with ropes so you cannot turn from side to side until you have finished the days of your siege.

1. What do you see?
2. How many months is 390 days? What is Ezekiel being asked to do?
3. What fatherly advice would you have for a friend who undertook this task? Would you admonish obedience? Or a psychiatrist?
4. How many months is forty days?
5. Why the discrepancy? What did Judah, the southern kingdom do repeatedly that the northern kingdom never did? How cleanly does repentance wipe the slate?
6. The exile of the northern kingdom began in 732 BC. These events in Ezekiel's life are taking place two hundred years later, beginning around 538. Will Ezekiel's action impact the past at all? What is the impact of this prophecy?
7. Read the [footnote below](#) on prophets and the prophetic. Why does God speak through our actions as well as through our words? Who is going to forget what Ezekiel did for 390 days? How heavily do God's people weigh on God's heart, even after centuries? What will be the impact of him turning again to his other side?
8. Talk about God's patience and His tolerance. How do Ezekiel's actions dramatize the truth of God's patience and His tolerance? When the limit was reached, what happened next? Yet, did God ever forget His people?
9. Has the Lord ever moved upon you to do something others called crazy? Do you have a testimony? Were you right? Or did you make a mistake?

10. How was Ezekiel protected from error? Why was his relationship with the Holy Spirit essential to his ministry, and the key to avoiding error? Was there anyone in Ezekiel's immediate circle qualified enough to give him counsel?
11. Was Ezekiel an island, alone and apart? Whom did God focus on through Ezekiel's ministry?

**Pastor's point 3. Commitment to a Community of Faith.** Ezekiel's ministry was effective in the context of the people to whom he was sent to minister. He did not stand alone. Neither did he prophesy so that people would read his prophecies thousands of years later. "He realized that he was not an individual apart and flying solo with God. He had to be a part of the community to which he was sent." For 390 days he bore the sins of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. And then for forty days he bore the sins of the Southern Kingdom, Judah. This act, as strange as it seems to us today, was keenly observed by the exiles with Ezekiel.

1. Why is his focus necessary to fulfill the task?
2. Why is Ezekiel's concern for his own people advantageous to himself? How does obedience become easier? And does his concern reach those around him?
3. Mark says, "We need to show that we need each other." With almost the entire nation in exile, what would have happened to the Jewish people with an "every man for himself" attitude? How did Ezekiel's ministry prevent the fracturing of God's people?
4. Thinking of today, what is the danger of splitting into separate camps? How do the relationships we have forged in a community of faith keep us safe?
5. Think again of the vision of dry bones above. How are we better off, seeing the reality of our present condition, when we're reminded together of God's promises that are beginning to stir us? Why is it good to know what God sees for us?

**Pastor's point 4: Commitment to a lifestyle of holiness and integrity that would set a person apart in a foreign land.**

1. Reviewing the passage Mark opened with in Hebrews 12 above, at the top of these notes, [14](#)[Continually] *pursue peace with everyone, as well as holiness, without which no one will see the Lord*, what does obedience to this exhortation look like?
2. How does one pursue peace?
3. The Greek tense is progressive, in other words, the pursuit is not a once on thing, but a continual effort. What does that look like? When do you stop the pursuit?
4. Why is holiness essential? Do you want to see God?
5. In the Beatitudes, Matthew 5, Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in spirit, for they shall see God." How is holiness related to a pure heart? Do you want to see God?
6. Can you explain why Ezekiel saw God?
7. How do you pursue holiness continually? What does it take to make this pursuit continual? When do you give up?
8. If, as Jesus said, "All men will know that you are my disciples by the love you have one for another," what will the church's impact on society be when we commit to setting these four points as a priority?
9. How will our commitment change this country? How does a small change in each of us as individuals have a greater impact on society as a whole? Why?
10. List the priorities that these steps imply? With whom does the change begin?

11. Remember your own testimony. Describe how the change begins in the deepest center of our being? How is the Word a life-bearing seed?

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**The Follow-up Application**

1. Use the [SOAP journal studies](#) below throughout the week.
2. Pray the prayer Mark mentioned above, “God, use me the way you designed me.” Then, ask His purpose. Write down what you hear.
3. Decide how salt and light behaves today in your circumstances. Write down your thoughts. Pray, “Holy Spirit change me, that I become salt and light.”
4. List steps to improve your relationship with the Holy Spirit. Take the first step.

**Take the time to pray.**

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**Scribe’s Notes:**

1. **On prophets and prophecy**—The principles of prophecy and the prophetic are taught in many faiths and religions, but nothing like the way they are presented to Christians in the New Testament. Begin your study by understanding what prophecy is not. **Prophecy is not mysticism**—rather than creating mysteries to contemplate, prophecy is drawn from God’s hidden realm to bring what is hidden to light. Proverbs 25:2 tells us, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter. It is the glory of kings to search a matter out.” Things are not hidden to obfuscate or confuse. God is not the author of confusion. He makes discovery a way and a call to be Christlike. This is why Jesus said, “Seek and you will find...” Indeed, we would not be seeking if there were not a hidden treasure to find. Thus, things are hidden because our own effort is required. The five wise virgins could not share their oil with the foolish. Oil must be individually acquired by individual effort. **Secondly, prophecy is not fortune telling.** Although, through the prophet, the days ahead can be revealed, Paul states clearly in the beginning of 1 Corinthians 14 that prophecy speaks the heart of God “...unto exhortation, edification and comfort.” When Jonah prophesied the destruction of Nineveh, destruction for that city was imminent, *and* it was postponed because the Ninevites responded to Jonah’s exhortation. In other words, Jonah’s prophecy CHANGED the course of history. **Thirdly, prophecy is not the province of the great and powerful, but it is most powerfully manifested to the humble and obedient.** The rank of Old Testament prophets runs from great kings like David to lowly shepherds like Amos...and to unknown Tishbites like Elijah, who sprang up out of nowhere, and yet rode to heaven in a chariot of fire, bypassing death itself. James 5 tells us, “**16**Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power to prevail. **17**Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. **18**Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth yielded its crops.” If Elijah is “just like us,” then we are called to be

just like him. **Finally, prophecy is not always only in words.** Throughout the Bible, as we saw with Ezekiel prophets are required to *behave* in a way to illustrate God's intention as a living parable. Isaiah walked naked for three years. Jeremiah wore a yoke. Agabus took Paul's belt and bound his own hands with it. God does have unusual ways to make His secrets clear and understood. And Paul warned the Thessalonians, "Do not extinguish the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies."

2. **On Ezekiel the prophet**—Ezekiel was a Levite born of Aaron's lineage of the priesthood. Like Daniel, he was carried away into Babylon with the favorable young men and the nobility whom Nebuchadnezzar customarily brought to Babylon from all his conquests. Unlike Daniel who was brought up in Babylon, Ezekiel found himself with the exiles by the Chebar (Kebbar) River, where his first vision occurred. This is an estuary that flows between the Euphrates to the south and the Tigris to the north, south and east of Babylon. Ezekiel knew of Daniel and his impact...because the latter's wisdom is featured in chapter 14 and chapter 28. Pastor Mark's observation that Ezekiel's focus was directed toward the exiles while Daniel's was directed toward the seat of government was astute and accurate...and ultimately both foresaw and described God's coming kingdom from different angles. Throughout the book, the Lord calls Ezekiel "Son of Man" or Ben Adam, Son of Adam. As mentioned in the notes, this is no accident, but it invokes the authority on the son that was originally delegated in full to the father. This is how one addresses nobility that is obtained by direct lineage. When Jesus invokes the title in the New Testament, the Greek text uses the same version of the title taken from the LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Rather than staying with "Son of Adam, the translators chose "υἱὲ ἀνθρώπου", *huié anthropou*, or "son of man." There is strong reason to believe that Jesus called himself *Ben Adam*, as God called both Ezekiel and Daniel.
3. **On Ezekiel the book**—The book of Ezekiel is one of the richest of the Old Testament. The scope is beyond this footnote to any justice, but here is an article from Bible Gateway that is excellent as an introduction:  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/intro/?search=Ezekiel&version=NABRE>
4. **On Ezekiel bread**—During the prophetic siege of Ezekiel's northern Kingdom described above in chapter 4, Ezekiel was to fast as well for all 390 days of the "siege." That fast would entail "defiled" bread: 4:**9***But take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt; put them in a single container and make them into bread for yourself. This is what you are to eat during the 390 days you lie on your side. **10**You are to weigh out twenty shekels of food to eat each day, and you are to eat it at set times. **11**You are also to measure out a sixth of a hin of water to drink, and you are to drink it at set times. **12**And you shall eat the food as you would a barley cake, after you bake it over dried human excrement in the sight of the people." **13**Then the LORD said, "This is how the Israelites will eat their defiled bread among the nations to which I will banish them." **14**"Ah, Lord GOD," I said, "I have never defiled myself. From my youth until now I have not eaten anything found dead or mauled by wild beasts. No unclean meat has ever entered my mouth." **15**"Look," He replied, "I will let you use cow dung instead of human excrement, and you may bake your bread over that." **16**Then He told me, "Son of man, I am going to cut off the supply of food in Jerusalem. They will anxiously eat bread rationed by weight, and in despair they will drink water*



by measure. **17**So they will lack food and water; they will be appalled at the sight of one another wasting away in their iniquity. Ezekiel was to eat mixed grains, contrary to the Law that required all foods to be single grain and pure. He was to roast it on human dung, defiling it further. But Ezekiel pleaded with God that he not roast it on human waste, and God allowed a more conventional, cheap, available and customary fuel source...manure from the field. Interestingly, nutritionists almost universally recognize the nutritional value of the grains he was to mix, and "Ezekiel bread" is sold as an excellent source for good health in health food stores worldwide. It is also delicious. But, as noted in commentaries online, this was not the end to Ezekiel's hardship: *"To eat bread by weight was a sign of a grievous famine; see ( Leviticus 26:26 ) ; a shekel, according to Josephus <sup>F9</sup>, weighed four Attic drachms, or half an ounce, wherefore twenty shekels weighed ten ounces; so that the bread the prophet had to eat was but ten ounces a day: **from time to time shall thou eat it; at the certain time of eating, or but once a day; from a set time in one day to the same in another; as from morning to morning, or from noon to noon, or from evening to evening.**"* Ten ounces of bread per day...with a sixth of a hin of water...somewhere between sixteen ounces and twenty ounces a day of water.

**For further study:**

Take a moment each day this week to apply the **SOAP**... (**S**cripture—Copy the scripture. / **O**bservation—Write what you see. / **A**pplication—What is God saying? / **P**ray—What is your response?) ...method to some of the scripture we looked at this week:

Monday: Hebrews 12:14-15
Tuesday: 1 Corinthians 14:1-4
Wednesday: Ezekiel 37:3-14
Thursday: Numbers 11:25-29
Friday: Proverbs 25:2
Saturday: Deuteronomy 29:29
Sunday: James 5:16-18

Once again, some passages suggested here have more than the usual number of verses. This is not to increase the burden but to provide clarity of context. Pick the verses that speak to you most clearly, and run these through the SOAP steps.