

engage

Diversity. That's the best way to sum up issue 16 of *engage*. From the story of a Jewish beauty queen to Jesus' death on the cross. From Ezekiel's wild visions to James' practical advice on Christian living. There's something for everyone so jump right in.

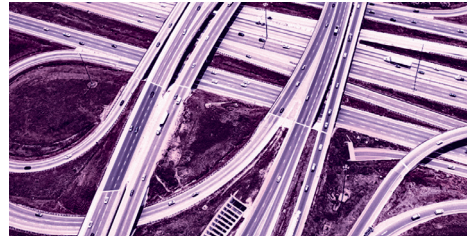
*** DAILY READINGS** Each day's page throws you into the Bible, to get you handling, questioning and exploring God's message to you — encouraging you to act on it and talk to God more in prayer.

THIS ISSUE: Experience incredible visions with **Ezekiel**; be challenged and encouraged by **James**; meet **Esther**, God's beauty queen; and follow Jesus' call to get ready in **Matthew**.

*** TAKE IT FURTHER** If you're hungry for more at the end of an **engage** page, turn to the **Take it further** section to dig deeper.

*** STUFF** Articles on stuff relevant to the lives of young Christians. This issue: **self-harm and eating disorders**.

*** TRICKY** tackles those mind-bendingly tricky questions that confuse us all, as well as questions our friends bombard us with. This time we ask: **What's the meaning of life?**



*** REAL LIVES** True stories, revealing God at work in people's lives. This time — **we meet Anand, who was brought up as a Hindu**.

*** ESSENTIAL** Articles on the basics we really need to know about God, the Bible and Christianity. This issue, we find out exactly what **church** is.

*** TOOLBOX** is full of tools to help you understand the Bible. This issue we concentrate on **quotations in the Bible**.

All of us who work on *engage* are passionate to see the Bible at work in people's lives. Do you want God's word to have an impact on your life? Then open your Bible, and start on the first *engage* study right now...

HOW TO USE **engage**

- 1 Set a time you can read the Bible every day
- 2 Find a place where you can be quiet and think
- 3 Grab your Bible, pen and a notebook
- 4 Ask God to help you understand what you read
- 5 Read the day's verses with **engage**, taking time to think about it
- 6 Pray about what you've read

BIBLE STUFF

We use the NIV Bible version, so you might find it's the best one to use with **engage**. If the notes say "**Read Ezekiel 1 v 1-3**", look up Ezekiel in the contents page at the front of your Bible. It'll tell you which page Ezekiel starts on. Find chapter 1 of Ezekiel, and then verse 1 of chapter 1 (the verse numbers are the tiny ones). Then start reading. Simple.

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EZEKIEL

Know God, know hope

Let's dive straight into the jaw-dropping book of Ezekiel. It's er... Well, the book kind of... Um... We're lost for words. Ezekiel left us terrified, overwhelmed, humbled, shocked and full of hope — all at the same time.

It could make you a different person too. In a mix of visions, drama, parables and poetry, Ezekiel blows apart any cosy, easy-to-contain, know-it-all view of God.

Ezekiel comes near the end of the Old Testament period. It's set in the last days of the tiny nation of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem. All that's left of the once great nation of Israel. In 597BC, armies from Babylon, sent by God, besieged Jerusalem and took the king (and several thousand others) into exile in Babylon. Including the prophet Ezekiel.

In 587BC, Judah collapsed. God was bringing His judgment so that His people would realise who He really is. The Babyonian troops pulverised

Jerusalem and its temple, the very place where God had shared His presence with His people.

God called Ezekiel to start preaching in 593BC — a few years before Jerusalem was completely conquered. Ezekiel spoke to a people under God's judgment. Just like the world today. People live, most not realising it, with God against them, facing His punishment for the way they've treated Him.

And what's God's message to people in that situation? First, it's a message of no hope. Once people realise there is no hope in a life rejecting God, they can discover that there is real hope for those who know God and His Son, Jesus.

Know God, as He really is, and know hope.



1

Tell a vision

Ezekiel's book is eye-opening and mind-blowing, right from the start. Get ready for visions of God. Watch out for violent storms, weird creatures, lots of fire and something even more spectacular.

Read Ezekiel 1 v 1–3
ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

What happened to Ezekiel when he was 30? (v1, 3)

Ezekiel switched from redundant priest (far from the Jerusalem temple) to red-hot prophet. God would speak again to His people — even far away in Babylon.

Read verses 4–21

What did Ezekiel see in his vision? (v4–9)

How are the creatures described? (v10–14)

What else did Ezekiel see? (v15, 21)

These four amazing creatures, with all their faces and wings, could see and move in any direction. Next to the creatures were incredible wheels/chariots that could move “wherever the Spirit [God’s Spirit] would go”

(v20). But Ezekiel was about to see something even more amazing.

Read verses 22–28

What incredible, terrifying thing did Ezekiel see next? (v22–24)

Who did Ezekiel see and how was he described? (v26–28)

The four creatures carried a vast platform. On it, seated on a throne, was an amazing fiery figure. This appears to be a glimpse of God Himself in human form — Jesus Christ. The book of Ezekiel is about God’s message to His people and it keeps pointing to the coming of Jesus. Tomorrow we’ll find out what the voice said to Ezekiel.

PRAY ABOUT IT

What is it about God that should leave you amazed? Praise and thank your all-powerful God right now.




TAKE IT FURTHER

Ezekiel basics on page 109.




2**Mission impossible?**

Ezekiel is having a vision of God and he's already seen some spectacular things. Now God tells Ezekiel exactly what his mission is. It's not going to be an easy one.

 **Read Ezekiel 2 v 1–8****ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN**



-  *What was Ezekiel's mission? (v3)*
-  *What hazards would he face? (v4–7)*
-  *How must Ezekiel be different? (v8)*

 **Read Ezekiel 2 v 9 – 3 v 15**

-  *How did God give Ezekiel the words to say? (v1–4)*
-  *Why would it be a difficult mission? (v7)*
-  *How would God help Ezekiel cope with opposition? (v8–9)*

Ezekiel's task was to take God's words of coming judgment to a people with a history of walking out on God and snubbing His spokesmen. No easy job, and one that scared Ezekiel.

 **Read vers 16–27**

-  *What made Ezekiel's mission so vital? (18–21)*
-  *What was the first surprising stage of his mission? (v24–27)*

God's message to His people was this — turn back to me or face the terrible consequences. It was Ezekiel's mission to deliver this message. By warnings and judgment, God's people would have to learn that God ruled. He's in control and He won't be upstaged.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Do you still think of yourself as centre of the universe? Ask the Lord to use Ezekiel to give you a clear perspective on life, with God at the centre of it.

 **TAKE IT FURTHER**

Find a little bit more on page 109.



3

Siege mentality

Ezekiel's first task was to preach about the future of God's city, Jerusalem. He'd show what would happen to the city by lying outside for a year, making models and cooking food on burning poo. Yes, really.

Read Ezekiel 4 v 1-8

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

▷ *How did Ezekiel show what would happen to Jerusalem? (v1-3)*

▷ *What would this reveal about God's people? (v4, 6)*

The Israelites had sinned against God for many years and would be punished for it. God told Ezekiel to lie on his side and “put the sin of the house of Israel” on himself (v4). This points us forward to Jesus who would suffer and die for people's sin.

Read verses 9-17

▷ *What else did God tell Ezekiel to do? (v9-12)*

▷ *What did this symbolise? (v13, 16-17)*

Cooking with dung is disgusting but it's nothing compared to what would happen to Jerusalem. God's people

would be attacked and they'd suffer a famine. But their real famine would be a spiritual one.

THINK IT OVER

▷ *How seriously does God treat sin?*

▷ *How will He treat those who reject Him?*

▷ *How should that affect our relationships with non-Christians?*

▷ *What are our responsibilities?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Pray for people you know who are “spiritually starving”. Ask God to feed them with the bread of life.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Spiritual famine is deadly.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

More about the bread of life on page 109.



4

Hairy story

Ezekiel is lying outside for over a year with a model of Jerusalem to illustrate what will happen to the city. And Ezekiel's not finished yet. Time for a shave...

Read Ezekiel 5 v 1–17

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *What did God tell Ezekiel to do next? (v1–4)*
- ▶ *What could the people of Jerusalem expect? (v2, 4)*
- ▶ *Why? (v5–6)*
- ▶ *How bad were God's people? (v7)*
- ▶ *What specifically had they done wrong? (v9)*
- ▶ *What would happen to them?*
v10:
v11:
v12:
- ▶ *What effect would this have?*
v13:
v15:

Imagine using a sword to shave your head — tricky! Ezekiel performed all these signs to show how devastating God's punishment would be. A third of the people would die from disease; a third would be killed by the sword; and a third would be exiled — sent to a foreign country.

This all sounds harsh (especially the cannibalism) but this was God's special, chosen people. He'd done so many incredible things for them and forgiven them so many times. Yet they continued to sin against Him and worship other gods. Unparalleled sin required unheard-of punishment. They got what they deserved.

THINK IT OVER

- ▶ *Why do we sometimes gloss over this side of God's character?*
- ▶ *What should God's anger remind us about sin?*
- ▶ *How should it affect the way we live?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask God to give you a true perspective on sin and how much it offends Him. Spend time talking to God about sins you struggle with, asking Him for help.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Hairy history on page 109.



5

Idol speculation

Things were looking bleak for Jerusalem. Surely it's time for some hope. Er, not yet (though it will come later in Ezekiel, we promise!). Now the target for God's punishment gets bigger than just Jerusalem.

Read Ezekiel 6 v 1–14

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▷ *What would God do because His people worshipped idols instead of Him? (v4–6)*
- ▷ *What would it achieve? (v7)*
- ▷ *What hope was there? (v8)*
- ▷ *What happens when people realise how badly they've treated God? (v9)*
- ▷ *What would happen to Israel? (v11–14)*

Skim read Ezekiel 7 v 1–27

- ▷ *What new message did Ezekiel bring? (v2, 3, 6)*
- ▷ *What had made this judgment unstoppable? (v8–9)*
- ▷ *What must these idol worshippers realise? (v4, 9, 27)*

It was one thing to say God would act in judgment. Quite another to say God was now on His way. Frightening. Maybe Ezekiel's hearers hoped for a quick return to Jerusalem. Ezekiel was saying: "You ain't seen nothing yet". No God, no hope.

THINK IT OVER

- ▷ *What false hopes about God do people cling to today?*
- ▷ *What do these chapters force us to see about God?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Thank God that He deals with sin and treats everyone fairly. Thank Him that, despite our sin, He sent Jesus to deal with our disgusting sin problem.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Idol talk on page 110.

6

Idol talk

The end was definitely on its way for Jerusalem. Next, God gave Ezekiel a supernatural bird's-eye view of its destruction. You may find some scenes quite disturbing. Ezekiel did.

 **Read Ezekiel 8 v 1–16****ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN**

- 1) *What did Ezekiel see in this new vision? (v2–4)*
- 2) *What “detestable” stuff did he see happening in Jerusalem? v5–6:
v7–13:
v16:*

Shocking. In God's temple in God's city, idols were being worshipped instead of God. You can probably guess what God's response will be.

Read 8 v 17 – 9 v 11

- 1) *What are the answers to God's questions in v17?*
- 2) *What shows us it's too late for God's people? (v18)*
- 3) *Who did the man with the writing kit save? (v4)*
- 4) *What happened to everyone else? (v5–6)*
- 5) *What upset Ezekiel? (v8)*
- 6) *What was God's answer? (v9–10)*

God's pitiless judgment would start with individuals (ch 9) and then reach the whole city (chs 10–11). But there was a glimmer of hope — those who were upset by all the sin against God would be saved. So far, this book seems heartless, cruel and depressing. But we will see God's great love and compassion shining through.

THINK IT OVER

- 1) *What would you say to someone who suggested it doesn't matter which god you worship?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Pray for friends of other faiths. Pray that God would show them He's the one true God.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Don't worship anything other than God. He won't tolerate it.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

More talk on page 110.



7

God's gone

We're inside another of Ezekiel's terrifying visions. Remember the four creatures from earlier? The ones with four faces and four wings and weird wheel things? Well, they're here too and they're called cherubim.

Read Ezekiel 10 v 1–17

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- What new task was the writing kit guy given? (v2, 6–7)*
- Whose presence was still in the temple? (v4)*

In his vision, Ezekiel saw God on a sapphire throne. The Lord sent a man to scatter hot coals over Jerusalem — to destroy it. Even worse than that, God was on the move...

Read verses 18–22

- What dreadful thing happened? (v18)*

God was about to remove Himself from His city — to abandon it. This was far worse than any of the punishments so far. Being abandoned by God is the worse thing that can happen to anyone. But it's the punishment for anyone who constantly rejects the Lord.

God's people had finished with Him. They refused to turn back to Him. So, eventually, God's patience ran out and He finished with them. They got what they asked for.

And yet that wasn't the end of the story for God's people. A small remnant would be saved. Tomorrow, Ezekiel will actually give us a message of hope! Really.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Rejecting God and being abandoned by Him is deadly serious. If you mean it, tell God you're committed to Him and ask Him never to leave you.

Pray for people you know who refuse to turn to God. However unlikely it seems, pray that God will do something miraculous in their lives.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Going going gone... to page 110.



8

A new hope

Ezekiel is packed full of doom and gloom and nothing else. Right? Wrong! Today we see great hope for God's people. OK, so maybe a little bit of doom and gloom first...

Read Ezekiel 11 v 1–12

v19:

v20:

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- What were the leaders of Jerusalem doing? (v2)*
- What did they claim? (v3)*
- What would happen to those arrogant murderers? (v9–10)*
- What would they realise? (v12)*

The evil leaders of Jerusalem were so arrogant: “We’re safe on the inside, like meat in a pot.” Oh no they’re not. There was no hope for them once they’d rejected God.

Ezekiel gets great news at last! God would take some of His faithful people back to His city. Check out the book of Nehemiah to see how this happened.

But Ezekiel is also pointing us to further into the future. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, God’s people will have a perfect future with Him. He will “put a new spirit” in His people (v19). They will be His people and He will be their God (v20). Forever. That’s the brilliant future for all believers.

Read verses 13–25

- What was Ezekiel worried about? (v13)*
- How did God comfort Him? (v16–17)*
- What would God's people do? v18:*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Do you look forward to your eternal future? Thank God for His promises. Thank Him that He will never leave those who trust in Him. Thank Him for the hope of a perfect future.

TAKE IT FURTHER

No *Take it further* today.



9

A big breakthrough

God keeps asking Ezekiel to do some weird stuff — they're pictures of what would happen to God's people. This time it involves a little domestic destruction.

Read Ezekiel 12 v 1–16

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- What did God tell Ezekiel to do? (v3–6)*
- What did it symbolise? (v10–14)*
- Would anyone listen? (v2)*
- What would they realise when it all came true? (v15–16)*

Only 4 years later, this all happened (2 Kings 25). Zedekiah tried to escape late at night but the Babylonians captured him. They took him back to Babylon, where he was executed.

Read verses 17–28

- Why would the people be anxious? (v19–20)*
- Yet what was their attitude? (v22, 27)*
- What was God's answer to them? (v23–25)*

People either said Ezekiel's words were nonsense and never came true, or they said: "Don't worry — none of this will happen for years". Both were dead wrong. God *would* punish this rebellious nation — and very soon.

Many people think Christianity is a load of rubbish and reject it. Others understand the gospel message but put off doing anything about it. For now they'll carry on living for themselves. But Jesus could return anytime. Don't leave it too late. It *will* happen. God's enemies *will* be punished and only believers saved.

SHARE IT

Think of someone you know who thinks Christianity is nonsense. And someone who knows the gospel but refuses to let it affect the way they live. Think of how you can share the truth of Jesus with these two people. Pray for them every day this week.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Another breakthrough on page 110.