



2

God Is Awesome

Key Theme

- God is awesome.

Key Passages

- Ezekiel 1:1–2:2; Isaiah 6:1–5; Revelation 1:12–17

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe Ezekiel's response to God's presence.
- Compare the reactions of Ezekiel, Isaiah, and John to God's glory.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.

- Write on the board, "What is awesome?"

- Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Studying God's Word

The prophet Ezekiel was privileged to experience a vision from God that gave him a glimpse of God's glory. Isaiah and the Apostle John had similar visions. In all three cases, the men of God reacted with complete awe as they saw God's glory. God alone inspires such awe. He alone is truly awesome!

- Go Before the Throne.

- Read through the lesson key passages and Prepare to Share.



Activity: Three Encounters

Students will examine three instances of people in the presence of God, considering the similarities in the actions and descriptions of the throne of God.

- Student Guides

- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

Ezekiel was a prophet in Judah for more than 20 years. He ministered at the same time as the prophets Daniel and Jeremiah.

He was among the captives that Nebuchadnezzar took from Jerusalem in the second wave of the captivity, Jehoiachin's captivity, in 599 BC (2 Kings 24:13–16). There is no other information about Ezekiel outside of his book. His death is not recorded in Scripture, but Jewish tradition says that he was killed at the hands of a prince he was rebuking. Ezekiel was called by God to be a priest and a prophet. His role was to deliver messages of both encouragement and calls to repentance to the captives in Babylon. He also told of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 588 BC. He lived along the Chebar River in modern-day Syria—Babylon—with the other captives from Judah. There he saw the heavens open and visions of God (Ezekiel 1:1–3).

This vision was significant! Ezekiel was brought into the very presence of God where he witnessed amazing creatures beyond description. In fact, as he wrote down what he experienced, you will notice that Ezekiel referred to the different parts of the vision as looking “like” something. He was at a loss to articulate in words what he was seeing and was left to use the pale and weak things in this world to describe the glories of the heavenly realm. What Ezekiel saw was surely awesome!

After describing the creatures around God's throne and the wheels that accompanied them (Ezekiel 1:4–25), Ezekiel shifted his focus to the place where God was. “Above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it” (Ezekiel 1:26). God appeared like amber on fire with brightness all around. The brightness appeared as a rainbow on a rainy day. This was the appearance of the likeness of

the glory of the Lord! Can you even begin to picture this in your mind? The glory of God is surely more than we can put into mere words. Ezekiel did the best he could—but this experience left him astonished as to how to properly describe this amazing vision of the holy God.

In response to this awesome scene, Ezekiel fell on his face as he realized the magnitude of what he was witnessing—an appropriate response to appearing before the King of kings.

As a prophet of God, Ezekiel was being called to a difficult and disheartening task; he was to deliver a message to a rebellious people, whether or not they would listen (Ezekiel 2:3–7). Ezekiel was encouraged by the vision of God and strengthened by the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 2:2). And so, he was able to stand, hear God's message, and with courage and power from the Holy Spirit, deliver the message of judgment to God's people.

And this wasn't Ezekiel's only vision. God was pleased to reveal His glory and majesty in other ways as Ezekiel warned of the destruction of the Jewish nation to come. Ezekiel's prophecies were realized when Jerusalem was burned and the Temple destroyed in 588 BC, seven years after his first vision.

Looking back in history 150 years before Ezekiel, we see that God had given Isaiah a similar vision. Isaiah, too, was commanded to deliver a message of judgment, one the Israelites would not heed. But before that, Isaiah, like Ezekiel, was brought to the holy throne room of God (Isaiah 6). Isaiah witnessed creatures similar to those Ezekiel saw. He heard them crying out before the throne, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6:3). Isaiah's response to seeing the glory of God was similar to Ezekiel's—he was undone and recognized his sinfulness in the presence of a holy God (Isaiah 6:5). Like Ezekiel, Isaiah's vision not only humbled the prophet, but also equipped him with strength and courage to persevere in the job he had been given—to call the people to repent or face the destruction of Jerusalem.

God did not reveal Himself in this way to many humans. But the Apostle John experienced a similar vision hundreds of years later. The book of Revelation

tells us that John heard a loud voice—the Alpha and the Omega. He turned to see the voice and saw one like the Son of Man. John attempted to describe what he witnessed—Jesus in all of His heavenly glory—in the limited language of this world (Revelation 1:11–16). Like Ezekiel and Isaiah before him, the glory of the Lord humbled him. And when he saw the Lord, he fell at His feet as dead (Revelation 1:17).

Through their visions of God’s glory, all three of these men were humbled, strengthened, blessed, and equipped by God to give His message to His people. And God had the visions recorded in His holy Word so we could hear of them.

God has given us a way to see His glory—not through visions like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John saw. But God has given us “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Jesus brought the glory of God to earth as a man. Our reaction to Christ and His glory should be similar to that of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Awestruck! That is what Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John were—filled with awe in the presence of God’s glory and holiness. What happened to them? The wonder of what they saw left them weak, humbled, contrite, and face down before the holiness of God. Awe is a word that is not very common in Western culture, but one of its forms can be found everywhere. “This cheeseburger is awesome!” “That movie was awesome!” “So-and-so is an awesome actor!”

Really? Do those entities really deserve the description “awesome”? Webster defines *awe* as “an emotion variously combining dread, veneration, and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or sublime.” A cheeseburger did that for you? If so, you have turned the cheeseburger into something that it shouldn’t be. God, however, should rightly inspire awe in us and the things He does or has created might do the same. You may have experienced awe at a sunset

over the mountains as the colors explode through the clouds, or at the birth of a child. Remember the awe you experienced at salvation or during moments of fellowship with God. It is God and His wonderful works that should inspire such feelings in us.

If we use a word like *awesome* to refer to everything around us that is remotely better than average, we risk losing an appreciation for the distinctive nature of God and confusing unbelievers when we refer to Him as awesome. Surely when we sing of the awesomeness of God, we are not comparing Him to a cheeseburger, so maybe we could find a different word for the cheeseburger and reserve the word awesome for the One who truly is and His works that truly are.

Think about it. You may find yourself wanting to restrict “awesome” in your vocabulary to the holy God of the universe and His mighty works. And take the opportunity to share the real meaning. Explain the awe that made Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John fall on their faces in the presence of God. Explain the awe you have for God because of what He did for you through Christ Jesus, our Redeemer and Lord.



BEFORE THE THRONE

You are awesome, Lord—truly awesome! I don’t say that enough. The word awesome is so overused in our culture. But as I ponder the true meaning of the word, I realize that you alone inspire wonder and dread and reverence—pure awe because of your holiness and greatness. That’s what I want my students to see in this lesson, Lord. I want them to keep using the word awesome. But when they use it, I want it to be about you. Change their focus. May the Holy Spirit, through your Word, reveal to them that only you are truly awesome. Please give them the desire to know more about who you are through your holy Word.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





Come On In

- Write on the board, “What is awesome?”
- Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.



Review

As you may remember, we are studying the period of the 70 years of the Babylonian Captivity. Last week we talked about Daniel’s faithfulness to God in refusing to eat from the king’s table and defile himself with the delicacies.

? How did we see God’s hand in the lives of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah?

God gave them favor in the eyes of the chief eunuch and granted them great wisdom as they studied. Eventually, they were placed in important roles in the king’s service. God prospered them for their obedience.

The example of faithfulness demonstrated by Daniel and the others is one that we can follow, ultimately looking to the obedience of Christ as the perfect

example. Daniel’s trust in God in the face of death demonstrates that having a true understanding of God’s character can help us to stand firm in the face of threats, possible compromise, and any situations that would defame the name and character of the God we serve. We can avoid blaspheming God in our words and actions as we place our full trust and faith in Him, empowered by His Spirit within us.

Our lesson today has us looking to one of the prophets who served God during the captivity. Ezekiel was offered an awesome privilege few men have known, and that will be our topic of study for today.



➤ Write on the board, “What is awesome?”



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

Ezekiel 1:1–2:2

Let’s read Ezekiel 1:1–2:2 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

? **What is the historical setting of this passage?** *It occurs in the fifth month of the fifth year of Jehoiachin’s captivity, which began in 599 BC.*

? **Where did Ezekiel receive the vision?** *The vision comes in the land of the Chaldeans, Babylon, near the River Chebar. This would be in modern-day Syria.*

- ? **What was Ezekiel's position?** *He was a priest and one of the captives in Babylon.*
- ? **How old was he?** *The reference to the thirtieth year is likely his age. It can't be the time he had been in captivity, that was five years, nor the time since the beginning of the captivity, that would have been 13 years prior in 607 BC. This also makes sense, since priests began their service at age 30.*
- ? **How did the vision come?** *In a whirlwind of cloud and fire.*
- ? **What else appeared from the cloud?** *Four living creatures.*
- ? **How would you draw a picture of one of these creatures?** *It would have four faces, four wings, legs with hooves, four wings, and the hands of a man. To complicate matters, verses 13–14 talk of their appearance as torches and flashing lightning.*
- ? **Why is the phrase "each of the four" repeated in verse 10?** *It is to make it clear that each of the four creatures had four faces (man, eagle, ox, lion) not that each of the four had different faces from one another.*
- ? **How is their movement described?** *They move in different directions without turning and there is some association with the wheels which had wheels in the middle of the wheels. They are also described as moving around like flashes of lightning.*
- ? **How are the words "like" and "likeness" used in the passage?** *They are used many times to refer to the things Ezekiel was seeing but could not quite describe. The elements he was seeing seem to resemble things on the earth, but they are a bit different and can't be directly identified with earthly things.*
- ? **What language is used to describe the throne scene in verses 26–28?** *The language is very guarded, using "like," "likeness of," and "appearance of" to attempt to describe what he was seeing.*
- ? **How did Ezekiel respond to seeing the glory of the Lord around the throne in verse 28?** *He fell on his face.*
- ? **How was Ezekiel able to stand?** *Only when the Holy Spirit entered him and empowered him to stand was he able to stand in God's presence.*
- ? **What else did Ezekiel experience in the presence of God?** *God spoke to him.*

Discover the Truth

We will look at the message God gave to Ezekiel in a few minutes, but let's stop to consider what Ezekiel experienced. He was not translated into heaven, but saw this in a vision. God revealed all of this to him in a miraculous and somewhat mysterious way.

- ? **Why did Ezekiel respond to the presence of God by falling to his face?** *He was in awe of the holy presence of the glory of the Lord shining brightly and brilliantly all around him. God's holiness was manifest in the glory that shone all around Him and His throne.*

Ezekiel was allowed to see a glimpse of the heavenly realm that lies somewhere beyond this earthly realm. But we have been granted that glimpse as well! God's Word reveals His holiness to us as we read these truths and meditate on them.



HOLY



Three Encounters

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Ezekiel is not the only person to receive such an audience with God. I would like you to examine two other encounters with God that are described in Scripture and compare them to the encounter we just read about. Read over the two other passages and look for similarities, recording them in your Student Guides in the Three Encounters activity. *Have the students compare Ezekiel 1:26–2:2; Isaiah 6:1–5; and Revelation 1:12–17, 4:2–8.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

- ? **What similarities did you find in these accounts?** *Similarities in the accounts: all three are visions, all three describe the exalted status of God either in position or describing the brightness, all three men are awestruck in the presence of God (John and Ezekiel falling to the ground), all three have some angelic beings present.*
- ? **How do you think you might respond in a similar situation?** *Discuss various answers, focusing on the awe that we should feel in the presence of the holiness of God.*

Awe is a word that is not very common in our everyday talk, but it is a word that is intended to convey dread and amazement at something that is above us—something

that transcends our normal experience. Ezekiel, John, and Isaiah were in awe of God with His holy majesty displayed before them. They recognized how sinful they were in the presence of God’s holiness. Their responses were appropriate in the presence of the awesome scene before them.

There is a word that gets used a lot—**AWESOME!** God’s throne and His presence were awesome—they inspired an awful response. I would submit to you that the word awesome has lost its impact in our culture today.

- ? **What things have you described or heard described as awesome in the past few weeks?** *Discuss various answers including television shows, people, various foods, places, etc.*
- ? **Do those things really inspire awe?** *Probably not. In fact, if a pizza brings us to a state of awe, we might be looking at the pizza as an idol, serving the created thing rather than the Creator.*
- ? **What things could rightly be called awesome?** *Things that God has made (stars, rainbows, sunsets, etc.) and God Himself are worthy of an awe-filled response. God’s acts and God’s character are appropriately called awesome.*

In displaying His awesome character and giving these men a glimpse into the heavenly throne room, God was preparing these men for an awesome responsibility.



READ THE WORD

Now that we have read about Ezekiel's experience in the presence of God, let's continue with the passage for some insight into why God allowed him this awesome privilege. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Ezekiel 2:1–3:15

➤ If time is short, read Ezekiel 2:1–10.

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

We aren't going to look at this passage in too much detail, but let's look at some of the main points.

- ? **What was the message God had for Ezekiel to deliver?** *A message of judgment for the nation*
- ? **Who was he to deliver it to?** *To the children of Israel—to those who were still living in Judah and Jerusalem during the captivity*
- ? **How are the Israelites described?** *They are a rebellious people who rebelled and transgressed God's law. They are also stubborn and impudent.*
- ? **What does God reveal about how the people will receive the message?** *They may receive it or they may not, but Ezekiel was to deliver it faithfully.*
- ? **What ideas are repeated in the passage?** *The description of the rebellious nature of the people is repeated, as well as the repeated call for Ezekiel to deliver the message regardless of the response.*
- ? **What is the symbolism of eating the scroll?** *The scroll represented receiving God's words so that they could be proclaimed. Even though the words were of judgment (lamentation, mourning, and woe), all of the words of the Lord should be sweet to those who love Him (Psalm 19:10, 119:103).*
- ? **What connection can we make between the vision of God's glory and the mission God was sending Ezekiel on?** *God had revealed Himself in a special way to encourage Ezekiel for the daunting task he had been called to do.*

Discover the Truth

God is wise. In His wisdom, God revealed His character to Ezekiel to offer him strength to carry out the mission he was about to be sent on. The same was true for Isaiah. God had sent him to deliver a message of judgment. Likewise, John was about to be told of the breadth and depth of the destruction that would come at the end of the age—in the Consummation we have mentioned.

This was the ultimate pep talk given by the sovereign, omniscient, infinite, immutable God to men who were weak, fragile, and not able to complete the task they were given apart from God's help.





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Ezekiel was to deliver a message of continued destruction to those who were still in Jerusalem. If you look forward to chapter 4, God called him to announce the captivity and destruction of Jerusalem through several object lessons. His role was not easy, and the people he was delivering the message to despised him. But Ezekiel trusted God and was faithful to deliver the message.

In all of this, the awesomeness of God should be what we come away thinking of. It was the glory of the Lord seated on the throne—the throne of His sovereign reign—that encouraged and strengthened all three of these men. We could also talk of Moses, his encounters with God, and the strength that he drew from intimate encounters with God's glory.

2 Corinthians 4:6

In 2 Corinthians 4:6, we read that “it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” We might be envious of the experiences of Ezekiel, Isaiah, and John, but we are privileged to have a revelation of God's glory in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Ezekiel and Isaiah were still looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, but we have the privilege of knowing Jesus in the fullness of the revelation of Scripture. He has been pleased to send us His Spirit to dwell within us (Romans 8:9).

As we read about and meditate on the glory of God revealed in the Scriptures and through all that we know about Jesus, we should be in awe of all that He is. We can express this awe in exalting Him as the King of the universe—praising Him for all that He has done for us in Christ.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

? If God never gives you a vision like the visions we have read about today, will you be able to understand the awesome nature of God? *We must think of what has been revealed to us in Scripture as sufficient, but times of meditating on Scripture and communing with God in prayer can help us draw closer to God.*

? In what ways have you experienced God’s awesome character? *Discuss various answers.*

? Recent popular books about taking trips to heaven have supposedly given us new insights into heaven. What does the general infatuation with such books tell us about the church’s (in broad terms) view of the sufficiency of Scripture? *If we look to new experiences by people as a source of truth about heaven, we are denying the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. Often, these stories contradict one another and Scripture, so we should dismiss them on those grounds. The visions we see in Scripture of heaven and the reactions of those who encountered God in that way show that those who explain heaven otherwise are not speaking the truth.*

? What is the danger in referring to God . . . and a cheeseburger . . . as awesome? *Some of your students may disagree, and we must acknowledge that language changes, but using awesome to refer to God and something trite can have the effect of minimizing God’s character. To insist that no one refer to anything other than God and His works as awesome would be legalistic, but it is a helpful exercise for us to consider our words and how we speak of God.*

? What is the connection between knowing God’s character and being an ambassador for Him? *The more we know about God, the more we can trust in His character and His Spirit to empower us to share the gospel, knowing that we will face persecution for communicating the truth.*

? How can you be intentional about sharing God’s awesome character with someone this week? *Discuss various answers.*



MEMORY VERSE

Proverbs 21:1 The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for His willingness to reveal Himself to us.
- Praise God for His holiness.
- Ask God for opportunities to declare His awesome character to others.

