



# Book of Ezekiel

## Chapter 3

*Theme: Preparation of the Prophet*

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## **Theme:** Preparation of the Prophet

**McGee Introduction:** In chapter 3 we have the preparation of the prophet for a hard job, a difficult assignment. Jeremiah was a different type of individual from Ezekiel. Jeremiah was the prophet of the broken heart, tears often streaming from his eyes. At that crucial moment in history God needed Jeremiah to let His people know that it was breaking His heart to send them into captivity. Now the people have gone into captivity, and they are bitter and rebellious. However, at this time the temple had not yet been burned or the city of Jerusalem destroyed. It would not be until seven years after this delegation of captives arrived in Babylon that that destruction would occur. Therefore, the false prophets were still telling the people that they were God's people and they would go back home. They said to this man Ezekiel, "Who do you think you are to tell us these things? We are God's people, and we are going back to our land. We will not be in captivity a long time." But God had told Ezekiel, "You tell them they are *not* going back. They are going to be in captivity for seventy years just as Jeremiah said. They are going to be in Babylon seventy years, and they are going to work hard there along the canals, working in the fields and building buildings. It is going to be a hard lot for them."<sup>1</sup>

**Clarke's Introduction:** This chapter contains more particular instructions to the prophet. It begins with repeating his appointment to his office, vv. 1-3. Ezekiel is then informed that his commission is, at this time, to the house of Israel exclusively, vv. 4-6; that his countrymen would pay little regard to him, v. 7; that he must persevere in his duty notwithstanding such great discouragement; and he is endued with extraordinary courage and intrepidity to enable him fearlessly to declare to a disobedient and gainsaying people the whole counsel of God, vv. 8-11. The prophet is afterwards carried by the spirit that animated the cherubim and wheels, and by which he received the gift of prophecy, to a colony of his brethren in the neighborhood, where he remained seven days overwhelmed with astonishment, vv. 12-15. He is then warned of the awful importance of being faithful in his office, vv. 16-21; commanded to go forth into the plain that he may have a visible manifestation of the Divine Presence, v. 22; and is again favored with a vision of that most magnificent set of symbols described in the first chapter, by which the glorious majesty of the God of Israel was in some measure represented, v. 23. See also Isaiah 6:1-13; Daniel 10:5-19; and Revelation 1:10-16; 4:1-11, for other manifestations of the Divine glory, in all of which some of the imagery is very similar. The prophet receives directions relative to his future conduct, vv. 24-27.<sup>2</sup>

## **Hope**

There are few things more revealing about the character of God than that he keeps sending preachers to bring his Word, even though people will not listen. There is always hope when God's Word is preached, and a nation can never know a more terrible situation than to have a famine of God's Word. In Wales, where I live, there is probably more faithful biblical preaching today than there has been for a hundred years. Yet sadly

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<sup>1</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 2:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

the Word is falling on deaf ears and there are very few conversions taking place. In fact, there are few who even hear it because few attend church on Sundays. But still the Word is there; God, in his mercy, still sends preachers. They may not be valued or appreciated but their presence is a token of hope.

If the Lord were to shut this door and remove his servants, what would happen? Faith comes through hearing God's Word (Rom. 10:17) so, if no gospel is preached, there can be no faith and there can be no hope. There is no greater darkness than the darkness of no gospel. It is a darkness so intense that nothing challenges sin, nothing addresses itself to the sinner's conscience and nothing can provoke the sinner to seek a better way. The darkness of a people who hear God's Word and then reject it is nothing like as terrible as the darkness of a people who never hear what the Lord has to say.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Britain is a place of great spiritual ignorance. Generations have grown up who have never been to Sunday school or church and who know nothing of the mercies of God. If they think of God at all, it is with blurred and distorted concepts. We are like Judah in Babylon—obstinate, stubborn and rebellious—but still God allows his Word to come to this nation. When the Word is preached, there is always hope and anything can happen.<sup>3</sup>

## **Ignorance**

If the preaching of the Word offers hope to sinners, it also takes away all excuse for sin. Whether they listen or fail to listen, people are confronted with the truth, and the same truth that can save will also condemn. People have a self-imposed ignorance. Paul deals with the question of ignorance in Romans 10.

The Israelites were not atheists or agnostics but people who were zealous for God. Their problem was ignorance. Their zeal was not based on knowledge. The sort of knowledge to which Paul refers has nothing to do with a person's intellectual ability, but is a knowledge that even a child can possess. Neither was their ignorance the result of the truth being hidden from them. They were ignorant in the presence of knowledge. The last verse of Romans 10 is a quotation from Isaiah 65:2: 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.' If you look up that verse in Isaiah, you will see that it goes on to say, '... people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations.'

It does not matter where a person begins the journey of faith—whether as an atheist, agnostic, or a deeply religious man or woman. What is common to all people when they think about God is what Paul calls 'zeal ... not based on knowledge', and what Isaiah describes as 'pursuing their own imaginations'. The atheist says, 'There is no God.' The agnostic says, 'It is not possible to know.' The religious person says, 'There is a God and this is how I perceive him to be.' Basically there is little or no difference in any of these three responses. All three are people making pronouncements about God.

The Bible message tells us, in effect, to stop talking, to be quiet and listen to what God has to say: 'Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ' (Rom. 10:17). The Israelites, though deeply religious, were not listening to God. Because of this, they did not know the true message of the gospel and had concocted a way of salvation which was unacceptable to God. This compulsive

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffery, P. (2004). *Opening up Ezekiel's Visions* (25–26). Leominster: Day One Publications.

tendency in people of producing a do-it-yourself way of salvation is one of the major obstacles to a true faith in God. Wherever it is present, there will inevitably be a rejection of God's way of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

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## Word Focus

### son of man

(Heb. *ben 'adam*) (2:1; 3:1; 17:2; 24:16) H1121; H120: The expression *son of man* is used nearly one hundred times as a title for Ezekiel (2:1). It serves both to emphasize the difference between God the Creator and His creatures, and to mark the prophet Ezekiel as a representative member of the human race. Ezekiel's life was a living parable or object lesson to the Hebrew captives in Babylon (compare 1:3; 3:4–7). In word and deed, Ezekiel was a “sign” to the house of Israel (12:6). Jesus adopted the title Son of Man because He too is a representative person—the “last Adam” who became a life-giving spirit (see Matt. 8:20; 1 Cor. 15:45). The title of Son of Man for Jesus also alludes to Daniel's vision of the heavenly being who is “like the Son of Man” (Dan. 7:13). Thus the title Son of Man for Jesus highlights the mystery of the Incarnation, the fact that Christ is both divine and human. As the God-man, Jesus became a glorious sign for all of sinful humanity (Luke 2:34).<sup>5</sup>

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### **Ezekiel 3:1**

**Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.**

**Missler:** The concept of “Eating the words” may sound a bit strange. Jeremiah said, “Thy words were found and I did eat them.” But it is interesting that the Lord Himself in Matthew 4:4, when He was confronted by Satan in the temptations, quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”

There are many levels of this concept of “eating His Word”: one is to fully digest what the Lord has said; another is to examine our daily diet—what are we putting in?<sup>6</sup>

**[Son of Man]** – again this is not to be confused with the title of Jesus Christ, here it means “son of the dust” to speak of Ezekiel's frailty and humanity.

**[eat that thou findest]** To eat the book signifies he was to be thoroughly acquainted with its contents so as to give out what was written in it.

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffery, P. (2004). *Opening up Ezekiel's Visions* (26–27). Leominster: Day One Publications.

<sup>5</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>6</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, [khouse.org](http://khouse.org)

**Clarke: Eat this roll, and go speak**—This must have passed in vision; but the meaning is plain. Receive my word—let it enter into thy Soul; digest it—let it be thy nourishment; and let it be thy meat and drink to do the will of thy Father who is in heaven.

**LAN: 1-3** In his vision, Ezekiel ate God’s message and found this spiritual food not only good for him, but also sweet as honey (see Rev. 10:8-10 for a similar use of this image). If you “digest” God’s Word, you will find that not only does it make you stronger in your faith, but its wisdom also sweetens your life. You need to feed yourself spiritually just as you do physically. This means doing more than simply giving God’s message a casual glance. You must make digesting God’s Word a regular part of your life.<sup>7</sup>

**eat ... and ... speak**—God’s messenger must first inwardly appropriate God’s truth himself, before he “speaks” it to others (see on Ez 2:8). Symbolic actions were, when possible and proper, performed outwardly; otherwise, internally and in spiritual vision, the action so narrated making the naked statement more intuitive and impressive by presenting the subject in a concentrated, embodied form.<sup>8</sup>

**Eat that thou findest.** Literally, *what you find, meet with*. The Lord touched Jeremiah’s mouth (Jer 1:9) but gave Ezekiel a scroll to eat. God’s immanence and transcendence are illustrated by the modes. 3. **Eat.** Literally, *make your belly eat*. **And fill your stomach.** Belly and stomach (*beṭen* and *mē.îm*) are both used of “abdomen,” “womb,” “inward parts,” and figuratively as the “seat of the emotions.” The message was given by God but was to be assimilated by the prophet and made his own. Although the words were bitter, the scroll tasted *sweet* because its contents were God’s word, and the privilege of being God’s messenger is a great joy. Among the passages that illustrate the inspiration of the mind and will through the “eating” of God’s word and that speak of the sweetness of that word are: Jer 15:16; Deut 8:3; Ps 19:11; 119:103; Rev 10:9, 10. (For inspiration through drinking, cf. II Esd 14:38-41.)<sup>9</sup>

**McGee:** “Eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.” This is quite a diet—he is to eat the Word of God. The Word of God should become part of us, my friend. No man ought to preach the Word whose heart is not in it and who doesn’t believe every word he says. Otherwise, he should get out of the ministry. The pulpit is no place for flowery speech and high-flown excess verbiage. The pulpit is the place to declare the Word of God.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Life Application Bible Notes

<sup>8</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 3:1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>9</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 3:1). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>10</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 3:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**1-3** Ezekiel was commanded to eat the scroll, i.e., God’s message, which he found to be as sweet as honey (Ps 119:103; Jer 15:16). John the apostle had a similar vision (Rev 10:9-11). The lesson is the same in both instances. No one is ready or qualified to speak for God until he has consumed His word (v. 4; Rev 10:11). This assimilation of the message of God makes it a part of the life of the prophet.<sup>11</sup>

**1-3 Revelation, Actions**—Ezekiel’s commission to proclaim God’s word took concrete form. Symbolic actions normally displayed God’s message concretely to the nation. This one was for the prophet’s personal benefit. For the dedicated proclaimer of the word, God’s message can be sweet. Compare, however, Jeremiah’s confessions. See Jer 15:16-18.<sup>12</sup>

The command to eat is now combined with the commission to go and speak.

**Chuck Smith:** In other words, devour it and then go give it forth. You see, that’s really what the ministry is all about. You devour the Word of God and then you give it forth to the people, where it is now a part of you. You read and absorb the Word until it becomes a part of your very life, and then you give it out unto others.<sup>13</sup>

### **Ezekiel 3:2**

**So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll.**

**Dake:** [So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll] In vision Ezekiel ate the roll, took it into his belly, and filled his bowels with it. He did not literally eat all the skins on which the book was written, but through the Spirit he digested its contents—they became written on the fleshly tables of his heart and filled his mind to overflowing (Ezekiel 3:2-3).<sup>14</sup>

**McGee:** For a good diet study the Word of God. May I ask you, do you love the person of Christ? Maybe I ought to first ask, do you love the Word of God? You will never love Him unless you love the Word of God.

A seminary professor asked me one time, “What *theory* of inspiration do you hold?” I said to him, “The theory I hold is no theory at all—*love the Book.*” You have to love the Word of God before it will ever become meaningful to you. The Word of God reveals a Person to you and then you fall in love with Him. Ezekiel said, “It was in my mouth as honey for sweetness”—he loved the Word of God.

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<sup>11</sup> Believers Study Bible

<sup>12</sup> Disciple’s Study Bible

<sup>13</sup> Chuck Smith, Pastor Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa CA

<sup>14</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

### **Ezekiel 3:3**

**And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.**

**Dake:** [as honey for sweetness] The book, after this symbolic action, became sweet to his taste, indicating that the reception of God's revelation is always sweet. The contents becoming bitter after being digested, as in John's case (Rev. 10:9), only indicates something hard to give out to the people, like lamentations, reasons for mourning, and woes upon them.

**Clarke:** **It was in my mouth as honey**—It was joyous to me to receive the Divine message, to be thus let into the secrets of the Divine counsel, and I promised myself much comfort in that intimate acquaintance with which I was favored by the Supreme Being. In Revelation 10:10 we find St. John receiving a little book, which he ate, and found it sweet as honey in his mouth, but after he had eaten it, it made his belly bitter, signifying that a deep consideration of the awful matter contained in God's word against sinners, which multitudes of them will turn to their endless confusion, must deeply afflict those who know anything of the worth of an immortal spirit.

**ESV: feed your belly.** Does this third instruction imply hesitation on the prophet's part? Finally, having tasted, the prophet gets another surprise: the words of mourning are not bitter, as one would expect, but **sweet as honey**. Ezekiel has taken a first step in obedience to the Lord.

**Constable:**<sup>15</sup> The Lord told Ezekiel to eat the scroll, a symbolic way of telling him to consume mentally and assimilate emotionally its contents.<sup>16</sup> After he did this he was to go and speak to the Israelites, to tell them what the Lord had revealed. So the prophet consumed the contents of the scroll as the Lord fed it to him. The words of the Lord were sweet to Ezekiel's taste as he took them in (cf. Rev. 10:9-10). The word of God has an intrinsically pleasing and satisfying quality to those who, like Ezekiel, receive it gladly (cf. Ps. 19:10; 119:103; Prov. 16:24; 24:13-14; Jer. 15:16).

"No matter how painful the labor, there is satisfaction in finding and doing the will of God and in realizing service in fellowship with the living God."<sup>17</sup>

**Jewish Study Bible:** Although the scroll is inscribed with lamentations, dirges, and woes (2:10), Ezekiel states that it tasted as sweet as honey (Jer 15:16).

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<sup>15</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable Notes on Ezekiel 2010 Edition

<sup>16</sup> E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible p.826

<sup>17</sup> Feinberg p.27

### **Ezekiel 3:4**

**And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them.**

Following Ezekiel's obedient response, the emphasis shifts from prophet to people, though both remain in view.

Note that this commission is repeated several times in various ways (Ezekiel 2:4,7; Ezekiel 3:1,4,11,17,22,27).

**4-9** Ezekiel was now equipped to go to the house of Israel and speak the word of God. That was exactly what he was to do. God warned him, however, about the nature of his mission. He was not being sent to a divergent group of peoples scattered over great distances. Unlike Jonah, he was not dispatched to a people of “unintelligible speech or difficult language.” He would not have to spend years in language study nor learn the customs of a strange land. The mechanics of language would be no problem. He was being sent to a people who should listen to him. Yet God warned Ezekiel again about the reaction of his audience. They would not listen to Ezekiel because they would not listen to God. The preacher should never take rejection personally. These people were “stubborn” (lit., of a hard forehead) and “obstinate” (lit., of a hard heart) (3:4–7).

God promised to equip Ezekiel emotionally and intellectually to deal with the anticipated rejection. God had made the prophet's face and forehead just as hard as theirs. He would be able to “butt heads” with his antagonists. If they were as hard as flint, Ezekiel would be as hard as a diamond. He was to be as stubborn for truth as they were stubborn in evil deeds. Therefore, for the second time (cf. 2:6) God directed his prophet not to fear his audience (3:8f.).<sup>18</sup>

**ESV:** The command to go and speak is repeated in v. 11, framing this second speech. While the first speech emphasized divine sending (2:3–4), here the focus is on the prophet's going.

**Jewish Study Bible 4-11:** Ezekiel's mission is outlined. Verse 6: Many peoples of unintelligible speech and difficult language, see Isa. 33:19. Many peoples were conquered by the Assyrian and Babylonian empires, and the men were frequently required to serve in the conqueror's army. Such practice aids in explaining the many references throughout the Bible to the nations that threaten Jerusalem (Isa 14:24-17:17, 12:14; Ps 2:46, 47, 48;). God stresses that the message is for Israel, not the nations.

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 3:4–9). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

### **Ezekiel 3:5**

**For thou *art* not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, *but* to the house of Israel;**

**Dake:** [not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel] You are not sent to a strange and barbarous people, but to your own beloved people who have become apostate and rebellious. Others would have heard you had I sent you to them, but not this people (Ezekiel 3:5-7).

**Clarke:** **Thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech**—I neither send thee to thy adversaries, the Chaldeans, nor to the Medes and Persians, their enemies. Even these would more likely have hearkened unto thee than thy own countrymen.

**[strange speech]** “Unfamiliar speech,” literally “deep lip and heavy tongue,” refers to a foreign language. Ezekiel was commissioned to speak to his people in their own language.

**Evangelism, Results**—God seeks faithful witnesses to share His Word. He knows our audience may be stubborn and refuse to respond. We are to be just as stubborn in our commitment to witness. God does not demand large numbers of converts as our result. He calls for faithful devotion to the task He has given.<sup>19</sup>

**ESV: 5–7** Contrary to expectation, Ezekiel is cautioned that a cross-cultural mission would be easier than taking words of God to his own people. There is nothing inherently derogatory about **foreign speech and a hard language**, although the terms could be negatively applied to a foreign oppressor (cf. Isa. 33:19).

### **Ezekiel 3:6**

**Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee.**

If I'd send you to these heathen, they would have listened to you. But I'm sending you to the house of Israel.

Ezekiel's task did not involve linguistic obstacles. He was not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language. Obscure (lit., “deep”) speech suggests words that are unfathomable or difficult to comprehend (e.g., the language of the Assyrians, Isa. 33:19). The words **difficult language** (lit., “heavy tongue”) can denote speech that is thick or sluggish. Moses used this expression to describe his lack of eloquence (Ex. 4:10). In Ezekiel 3:5 it probably means words that are hard to understand because of a language barrier (v. 6). Ezekiel faced no such hurdle. His message was not for some distant land with an exotic language; it was for Israel. Though going to another culture and nation

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<sup>19</sup> Disciple's Study Bible

would have been difficult because of the language problem, the results elsewhere would have been more rewarding. Had Ezekiel gone to another nation, **they would have listened to** him. Amazingly those who knew nothing of the true God of the universe would have been more responsive than those who claimed His name.<sup>20</sup>

### **Ezekiel 3:7**

**But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel *are* impudent and hardhearted.**

**Missler:** He is saying that if the language were difficult, or if it were that sort of impediment, it would not be a problem. In this case Ezekiel, was being called to his own people. But God tells him up front that “They will not hear you, because they would not hear me.”

Why would God send Ezekiel if He knows the people won’t listen, why bother? So that God might be just when He judges. Ezekiel was in the second deportation and with the captives in Babylon while Jerusalem was a vassal city. As long as Jerusalem had not fallen, Ezekiel’s message would be to his people, admonishing them to flee idolatry and return to the Lord. For the remnant who did hear him, that was valuable; but the period of grace finally ran out and God’s judgment fell on the House of Israel, and all the rest of the people were brought into captivity. That is the point of time when Ezekiel’s message shifted. That is also when our attention is picked up, because he will talk about 1948 and 1967. It will get contemporary very quickly at that point.

Ezekiel was first called to the House of Israel, and then to You and I. This book is more than just Biblical background, it has something to say to us personally.

**Dake: [But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee ...]** The first prophecy in Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3:7-9, fulfilled). The next prophecy will be in Ezekiel 3:25.

Three Predictions—Fulfilled:

1. The house of Israel will not hearken unto Me (Ezekiel 3:7).
2. I have made (will make) your face strong against their faces, and your forehead against their foreheads (Ezekiel 3:8).
3. I will make your forehead as an adamant (diamond, Ezekiel 3:9).

**Clarke: Impudent and hard-hearted**—“Stiff of forehead, and hard of heart.”—Margin. The marginal readings on several verses here are very nervous and very correct.

At the outset God warned Ezekiel not to expect dramatic results from his ministry (cf. Isa. 6:8-13; Jer. 1:11-19). In contrast with the open reception Ezekiel would receive from other nations, Israel was not willing to listen to him. She would reject him because she had rejected God. The people were not prepared to “listen to” or respond to Ezekiel because they were not willing to listen to God. Their spiritual deafness was acquired over

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<sup>20</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 3:5–6). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

long years of exposure to and rejection of God's word given by the prophets. Israel's response to God in the past was a harbinger of the response Ezekiel could expect.

The nation's malady extended to **the whole house of Israel**. This does not imply that every Israelite had rejected God, for Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were all ministering faithfully. God was referring to all parts of Israel rather than every Israelite. Rebellion had made its way into the royal household, the temple, the courts of justice, and into every city and town in the land. Though individuals here and there were still responding to the Lord, the nation as a whole had turned from Him.<sup>21</sup>

**Sin, Rebellion**—A preacher of God's Word must always remember whose Word is proclaimed and understand any rejection accordingly. A sinful people become "hardened and obstinate" (literally firm of forehead and stiff of heart). They choose not to listen to God's Word. That choice is sinful.<sup>22</sup>

**Constable:** Nevertheless the Israelites would not listen to Ezekiel since they refused to listen to the Lord who sent him (cf. Num. 14:1-12; 1 Sam. 8:4-7). All of them were very stubborn and obstinate. The Lord had similarly told Isaiah and Jeremiah not to expect dramatic positive response to their ministries (Isa. 6:8-13; Jer. 1:11-19).

"There is none so deaf as the person who does not want to hear."<sup>23</sup>

"The difficulties of cross-cultural communication are nothing compared to the obstacle of spiritual blindness."<sup>24</sup>

### **Ezekiel 3:8**

**Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads.**

"I have made you just as hardheaded as they are..." God is preparing him to endure the abuse that he would suffer from his own people.

**[I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads]** God equipped Ezekiel for the hard work before him. He would have to be bold, hard, stubborn, and unyielding to be able to cope with these hard and stiffhearted people. God compared the prophet to adamant harder than flint (Ezekiel 3:8-9). The adamant was a diamond—the hardest of stones (Jeremiah 17:1). He should be able to cut the hard hearts to the core.

**Strong.** Perhaps a play on Ezekiel's name, *God strengthens*. Cf. Jer 1:18; 15:20. 9. **As an adamant harder than flint** (ASV). Hebrew *shāmir* is a foreign word, possibly related to

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<sup>21</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 3:7). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>22</sup> Disciple's Study Bible

<sup>23</sup> Allen p, 42

<sup>24</sup> Cooper p. 80

the Akkadian *ašmar*, “emery.” It is also translated *adamant* and *diamond* (cf. Jer 17:1; Zech 7:12). For opposition between the true prophet and the people, see Amos 7:10-17; Jer 20:7-18; 26:1-24.<sup>25</sup>

**Revelation, Messengers**—Delivering God’s word is a difficult task. The messenger must face hard opposition without fear. The messenger of judgment must personify God’s anger against the sinful people. God’s Spirit leads the messenger and gives strength for the task. One aspect of the messenger’s task is that of watchman, hearing God’s warning and applying it to the life of the people, seeking to turn them back to God’s ways.<sup>26</sup>

**I have made your face strong:** There may have been an intentional pun on Ezekiel’s name, which means “strongly seized by God” (see 1:3) or “God strengthens.” Double meanings in biblical names are common (see Cain; Gen. 4:1). The prophet was adequately equipped by God for his calling.<sup>27</sup>

### **Ezekiel 3:9**

**As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they *be* a rebellious house.**

God also said He would **make Ezekiel’s forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint.** Figuratively “forehead” expresses determination or defiance (cf. Isa. 48:4; 50:7, “face” is lit., “forehead”; Jer. 3:3, “the brazen look of a prostitute” is lit., “a harlot’s forehead”; 48:45). Ezekiel’s determination would not waver when beset by opposition. “Flint,” the hardest stone in Palestine, was used by Israel for knives (cf. Josh. 5:2-3) and other implements. Ezekiel’s God-given strength and determination would withstand any opposition (cf. Jer. 1:18).

Because of God’s empowering of Ezekiel, He could command him **not to be afraid of them or terrified by them** (cf. Jer. 1:17). Though opposition was certain to come, Ezekiel had nothing to fear. God’s power was more than adequate to overcome the expected resistance. **Rebellious house** is a term for Israel that Ezekiel used 12 times (Ezek. 2:5-6, 8; 3:9, 26-27; 12:3, 9, 25; 17:12; 24:3; 44:6), apparently to underscore the people’s defiance against God.<sup>28</sup>

**McGee:** The Lord tells Ezekiel, “You are to go ahead and give them My Word, and I am going to make your head hard.” Now God didn’t make Jeremiah’s head hard. Jeremiah had a soft heart, and he couldn’t stand up against all the trouble he faced. At one time he even went to the Lord and resigned. Ezekiel is not about to resign. God says, “The children of Israel are hardheaded, and I am going to make your head harder than theirs.”

A man came to me one time and said, “You know, our preacher really talked hard to the board the other night, and I don’t think a preacher ought to talk that way to the

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<sup>25</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 3:8). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>26</sup> Disciple’s Study Bible

<sup>27</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>28</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 3:9). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

board.” “Well,” I said, “what kind of a board is it?” He replied, “They’ve caused the pastor a lot of trouble.” I told him, “That’s the kind of problem Ezekiel had, but God made his head harder than Israel’s. I just hope your preacher’s head is harder than anyone’s on the board.”

“Adamant stone” is the Hebrew *shamed* and is translated “diamond” in Jer 17:1.

**ESV: 9b–11** The conclusion to the second speech echoes and expands on that of the first (2:6b–7). Despite the striking resemblance of the English texts, the Hebrew is cast quite differently in the two passages. This could simply be stylistic variation. If the Hebrew constructions are intended to carry a nuance, then 2:6b–7 has the force of an immediate instruction (“don’t be afraid [now]!”) while 3:9b–11 has that of a blanket prohibition (“never fear!”). It could also carry the implication that Ezekiel, now that he has been divinely toughened, simply will not be afraid.

**Constable:** The Lord had made Ezekiel as hard-nosed as the Israelites; he would not give up speaking to them any more than they would refuse to listen to him. Therefore the prophet should not fear his audience. The meaning of Ezekiel's name, "God strengthens (or hardens)," reminded the prophet and others that the Lord would strengthen him and harden him against the attacks of his critical enemies.

### **Ezekiel 3:10**

**Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears.**

**Dake:** [all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears] In the experience of every true prophet the words of God must be received into one's own heart in order to give them out effectively to others. If the word of the preacher comes only from the intellect it will only appeal to the intellect and fall short of reaching the hearts.

**LAN: 10-11** Ezekiel needed to take God’s words to heart before preaching them to others. God’s message must sink deep into your heart and show in your actions before you can effectively help others understand and apply the gospel.

**receive in ... heart ... ears**—The transposition from the natural order, namely, first receiving with the *ears*, then in the *heart*, is designed. The preparation of the heart for God’s message should precede the reception of it with the ears (compare Pr 16:1; Ps 10:17).<sup>29</sup>

**10-15:** An effective servant of God must know two things. He must know (1) the word of the Lord; and (2) the needs of God’s people. The first priority of any preacher is to be

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<sup>29</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 3:10). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

attuned to God's word. The word of God is that which fortifies the messenger against the hostilities of the enemy. So Ezekiel was told to take into his heart "all my words which I shall speak to you." He must "listen closely" whenever God spoke to him (3:10f.). A good preacher must first be a good listener. This will enable him to speak with authority and credibility to his contemporaries. The words "thus says the Lord God" will not ring hollow from the lips of one who is the epitome of an obedient servant.

The servant of God must also be attuned to the needs of his audience. For this reason God commissioned Ezekiel "to go to the captives." The prophet was reluctant to leave the scene of his dramatic encounter with God. He was not anxious to undertake the hard service to which he had been assigned. So God took matters into his own hands. Ezekiel felt himself being "lifted up" and taken away by the Spirit of God. At the same time the *merkabah* departed amidst a cry of praise apparently from the cherubim: "Blessed be the glory of the Lord in his place." Ezekiel heard the noise of great shaking as the wings of the cherubim were raised and began vibrating. The wheels of the *merkabah* rumbled as the visionary chariot began its take off (3:12f.).

Ezekiel described how he felt as he departed from his mountain top experience. He went "embittered in the rage of my spirit." Perhaps he was angry because the blessed experience had so quickly come to an end. Like Isaiah and Jeremiah before him, he was initially reluctant to undertake the task to which he had been called. Another interpretation is that he was filled with righteous anger over the sin of Israel. In any case, he was very conscious that "the hand of the Lord was strong" on him. He felt God's power filling him (3:14).

Guided by the Spirit Ezekiel returned to his countrymen at Tel-abib near the Chebar canal. For seven days he sat among them, perhaps motionless and dumb, as he awaited further instructions. During this period he was "overwhelmed" (NIV), i.e., astonished, amazed and silent. What was the purpose of this seven-day period which God forced on the reluctant prophet? Ezekiel needed to develop sympathy and empathy before he began to preach. He needed to see these people as God saw them. This was a time of reflection and observation such as many great men of God experienced prior to launching their ministries. Those days of silence changed his attitude about his mission. He learned patience; he came to accept responsibility (3:14f.).<sup>30</sup>

**ESV:** Embedded in this charge, God's words give one of the few descriptions of prophetic experience in the OT, involving both a psychological (**receive in your heart**) and an auditory (**hear with your ears**) element (cf. Job 32:18–20; Jer. 20:7–9).

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<sup>30</sup> Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 3:10–15). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

### **Ezekiel 3:11**

**And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.**

God was telling Ezekiel, “You are going to speak with my voice.” “Thus saith the Lord” exposed him to the death penalty if he was wrong. The concept of blasphemy in Israel was a capital crime.

**[whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear]** This expression occurs three times in these commission chapters for the sake of emphasis and to express God's knowledge of their reception of His message (Ezekiel 3:11; Ezekiel 2:5,7).

**Constable:** The Lord Yahweh instructed Ezekiel further to take to heart all that He would tell him and to listen closely to Him. He was to go to the Jewish exiles and relay God's messages whether they paid attention or not. God's word must become a part of the messenger before he or she can go and speak to others about it (cf. v. 1; Ezra 7:10).

"The most difficult task of a prophet is to change people's minds. This means pulling up the weeds of false theology and planting the good seed of the Word of God. It also means tearing down the flimsy thought structures that false prophets build and constructing in their place lasting buildings on solid foundations of truth (. . . 2 Cor. 10:3-6).<sup>31</sup>

### **Ezekiel 3:12**

**Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place.**

“Great rushing” reminds us of Acts 2.

**[Then the spirit took me up]** Then—after he had been commissioned three times to go to Israel, the Spirit took him up and away to the captives that dwelled in a settlement on the river Chebar (Ezekiel 3:12-16).

**Dake: [great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place]** Four great noises heard in his flight:

1. A great voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from this place (Ezekiel 3:12).
2. The noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another (Ezekiel 3:13).
3. The noise of the wheels that were over against them.
4. The noise of a great rushing of the cherubim.

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<sup>31</sup> Wiesbe, p. 164

**Clarke: Then the Spirit took me up**—This, as Calmet remarks, has been variously understood.

1. An impetuous wind carried him to the place where his brethren sojourned.
2. The Holy Spirit, which filled his heart, transported him in a moment to the place where the captives were.
3. Or, he was so transported with heavenly ardour in his mind, that he ran immediately off, and seemed to fly to the place where God commanded him to go.

The promptitude and impetuosity of his spirit seemed to furnish him with wings on the occasion. However this may be understood, the going to the captives was real.

**Clarke: A voice of a great rushing**—This was the noise made by the wings of the living creatures that formed the chariot of Jehovah. See the notes on Ezekiel 1 (note) and Ezekiel 10 (note).

**Clarke: Blessed be the glory of the Lord**—Probably the acclamation of the living creatures: “Let God be blessed from the throne of his glory! He deserves the praises of his creatures in all the dispensations of his mercy and justice, of his providence and grace.”

(Ac 8:39). Ezekiel’s abode heretofore had not been the most suitable for his work. He, therefore, is guided by the Spirit to Tel-Abib, the chief town of the Jewish colony of captives: there he sat on the ground, “the throne of the miserable” (Ezr 9:3; La 1:1–3), seven days, the usual period for manifesting deep grief (Job 2:13; see Ps 137:1), thus winning their confidence by sympathy in their sorrow. He is accompanied by the cherubim which had been manifested at Chebar (Ez 1:3, 4), after their departure from Jerusalem. They now are heard moving with the “*voice of a great rushing* (compare Ac 2:2), *saying*, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place,” that is, moving *from the place* in which it had been at Chebar, to accompany Ezekiel to his new destination (Ez 9:3); or, “from His place” may rather mean, *in His place and manifested “from” it*. Though God may seem to have forsaken His temple, He is still in it and will restore His people to it. His glory is “blessed,” in opposition to those Jews who spoke evil of Him, as if He had been unjustly rigorous towards their nation [CALVIN].<sup>32</sup>

**Then the spirit took me up.** See also Ezk 3:14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5 These are not references to physical levitations, as in Bel and the Dragon, verses 36, 39; nor to clairvoyance; but to the mystical experiences of a highly sensitive soul under the exaltation of the Spirit. And as the glory of the Lord arose from its place. Since *k* and *m* are easily confused in the paleo-Hebrew script, Hitzig and Luzatto, arrived at this reading by changing *brwk* (bārûk) of the MT to *brwm* (bfrûm). There is no reference to a heavenly anthem being sung or heard. Rather, the prophet heard the sound of a great earthquake (AV, *noise of a great rushing*). 13. Sound of the wings ... as they touched one

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<sup>32</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 3:12). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

another. Literally, *kissed*. **That sounded like a great earthquake** (RSV). *And a sound of* (lit.).<sup>33</sup>

**Blessed ... from His place:** This **thunderous** acclaim in praise of the living God came from His myriad of angelic armies (compare Isa. 6:3). **glory:** The word suggests “weight” or “significance,” indicating the wonder, majesty, and worthiness of the living God.<sup>34</sup>

**ESV: the Spirit lifted me up.** Simultaneous events are being described: Ezekiel is being taken away, but at the same time the throne of the Lord is departing. There is ambiguity in the Hebrew *ruakh*: “Spirit” implies the divine spirit (see notes on 1:4 and 1:12) but, given the stormy setting, “wind” (esv footnote) or the Spirit manifested in the form of wind is also possible. However, there is a tacit “transportation” here (see 3:15), and the parallels in 8:3 and 37:1 point toward this certainly being the divine Spirit in action in some form.

**Jewish Study Bible:** The prophet relates his bitterness at being compelled to speak such a harsh message of judgment, yet he seems not to have the ambivalences concerning his prophetic role seen in Jeremiah. The statement, *Blessed is the Presence of the Lord, in His place* appears as part of the “Kedushah” in the “Amidah” prayer. The proposed emendation is almost certainly correct and involves the confusion of a single letter with a very similar letter in the old Heb script. The emendation fits a main theme of the initial section of Ezekiel: divine abandonment reflected through the gradual departure of the divine spirit from the Temple (see esp 11:23).

### **Ezekiel 3:13**

***I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing.***

**Missler:** From this verse and others we can draw the inference that what he saw in Ch. 1 was not allegorical, not an hallucination, but was somehow Ezekiel’s attempt to describe, in conceptions of 2500 years ago, what he saw when he was confronted with this strange presence. It gives us the opportunity to perceive into that dimension in which these other creatures operate.

**A great rushing**—All the living creatures and the wheels being then in motion.

**touched**—literally, “kissed,” that is, closely embraced.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 3:12). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>34</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>35</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 3:13). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**ESV:** The Throne of the Lord Withdraws. The departure of the glory of God is accompanied by the same sensory experiences as its approach (cf. 1:24).

In the audience with God, the living creatures have been momentarily forgotten, but their movement brings them dramatically into focus once more.

**Constable:** The Lord's Spirit next lifted Ezekiel up and he heard a loud rumbling sound behind him. The sound was the sound of voices that blessed God for His glory (cf. Rev. 4—5). He also heard the sound of the cherubims' wings and the sound of the wheels rumbling. He was having another vision.

### **Ezekiel 3:14**

**So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.**

**[lifted me up, and took me away]** This can be taken literally, as the experiences recorded in Acts 8:39-40; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 1:10; Rev. 4:1.

**[bitterness, in the heat of my spirit]** The prophet was angry at seeing the condition of his people and their attitude against Jehovah and His message. He was filled with righteous indignation which God inspired against the sins he was called to denounce.

**[the hand of the LORD was strong upon me]** This means that he was strengthened by divine power for his mission, which at the easiest point would be difficult and hard on him (Ezekiel 3:14,22; Ezekiel 1:3; Ezekiel 8:1; Ezekiel 33:22; Ezekiel 37:1; Ezekiel 40:1).

**Clarke: I went in bitterness**—Being filled with indignation at the wickedness and obstinacy of my people, I went, determining to speak the word of God without disguise, and to reprove them sharply for their rebellion; and yet I was greatly distressed because of the heavy message which I was commanded to deliver.

**Bitterness** means “distress” and “anguish.” Ezekiel’s human perspective caused him to focus on the distasteful calling of delivering a message no one would listen to. The prophet was angry—**heat of my spirit**—and appalled. But the **hand of the LORD** was present to help him deal with these feelings and then move him on to live and work among the captives (see v. 15).<sup>36</sup>

The Spirit lifted Ezekiel up and took him away from where he had been in his vision. He did not want to go and carry out the ministry that God had given him. His would not be a "successful" ministry in the eyes of people. But the Lord influenced him so strongly that he felt he had to obey (cf. Jer. 20:9; Jon. 1).

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<sup>36</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

"The prophet was lifted up into sympathy with God and shared his righteous indignation against Israel."<sup>37</sup>

Scholars of a more liberal persuasion often believe that references to the Spirit in the Old Testament indicate the power or influence of God, not the third person of the Trinity. Some conservative scholars believe that, though the Spirit was really the third person of the Trinity, people living during the Old Testament period did not associate the Spirit with God Himself. They thought of the Spirit as a power or influence of God. However there are several indications in the Old Testament that informed Israelites identified the Spirit with God (cf. Gen. 1:2; 2 Kings 2:9; Ps. 104:30; Ezek. 3:12-14; 11:1; Zech. 4:6)

### **Ezekiel 3:15**

**Then I came to them of the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.**

**Missler:** "Tel-abib" is Tel Aviv. (The "b" and "v" are equivalent in the Semitic language.) This was not the Tel Aviv which we know today, but apparently it was their settlement by the Chebar in Babylon which had that name.

"Seven days" - the whole experience of what he saw in Ch 1, and the Lord talking to him through Chapters 2 and 3, left Ezekiel physically overwhelmed for 7 days.

Why 7 days? One suggestion is that seven days were appointed for the consecration of the priests. Cf. Lev 8:33. He was a priest and was being consecrated. The 7 days seems to be consistent with God's pattern.

**Dake: [I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days]**

He sat down among the captives astonished for seven days, at the end of which the word of the Lord came to him (Ezekiel 3:16; cp. Job 2:13). The Lord guarded both Ezekiel and his countrymen from dwelling exclusively on the national character of his mission. In the midst of general judgments each person was to stand alone before his God and give account of himself according to his own works (Ezekiel 3:17-27; Ezekiel 18:1-23; Ezekiel 33:1-20).

**Clarke: Seven days**—Perhaps God kept him all this time without an immediate revelation, that the bitterness and heat of spirit of which he speaks above might be subdued, and that he might speak God's words in God's own Spirit. Had he gone in a better spirit he had probably been employed in his work as soon as he had gained the place of labor.

**LAN: 14-15** Ezekiel was bitter and angry, not at God, but at the sins and attitudes of the people. Ezekiel's extraordinary vision had ended, and he had to begin the tedious job of prophesying among his people, who cared little about God's messages. Before the exile, the people had heard Jeremiah, but they would not listen. Here Ezekiel had to give a similar message, and he expected to be rejected as well. But Ezekiel had the vision of the

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<sup>37</sup> Davidson p 21

living creatures and the rumbling wheels on his side. He had nothing to fear because God was with him. Despite knowing the probable outcome, Ezekiel obeyed God.

As we grow, we will have times of great joy when we feel close to God, and times when sins, struggles, or everyday tasks overwhelm us. Like Ezekiel, we should obey God even when we don't feel like it. Don't let feelings hinder your obedience.

Ezekiel sat quietly among the people for seven days. This was the customary period of mourning for the dead (Genesis 50:10; 1 Samuel 31:13; Job 2:13). Ezekiel was mourning for those who were spiritually dead. Tel Abib was the location of the settlement of Jews who were exiled from Jerusalem.

**Tel-Abib**—*Tel* means an “elevation.” It is identified by MICHAELIS with *Thallaba* on the Chabor. Perhaps the name expressed the Jew's hopes of restoration, or else the fertility of the region. *Abib* means the *green ears* of corn which appeared in the month Nisan, the pledge of the harvest.<sup>38</sup>

**McGee: 15-19** God gives to Ezekiel the job of being a watchman to warn His people. They may not want it, but he is to warn them. God says to him, “If you do not warn them that they are going to die in their sins I am going to hold you responsible. However, if you warn them and they continue in their disobedience and die in their sins, you will not be responsible.”

My friend, I would hate to be in the place of a minister who does not give out the Word of God. I'd hate to be in his position and stand before the Lord Jesus someday in judgment. A man who has the Word of God should have the intestinal fortitude to declare the Word of God. This was Ezekiel's responsibility, and God chose the right man for the job—he was as hard as a hickory nut.

The watchman held a very important position in the ancient world, in that day of walled cities. The cities were walled for protection, and the gates were closed at nightfall. A watchman then ascended the wall to begin the vigil of the long, dark night. With a trained eye he peered into the impenetrable darkness which surrounded the city. With a trained ear alert to every noise, he listened for the approach of danger, for the approach of an enemy.

The Word of God has quite a bit to say about the watchman. In Isaiah 62:6 we read: “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night . . . .” And then in Psalm 127:1 it says, “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

In the Hebrew culture, the watchmen functioned in three watches of the night; that is, they had three shifts: from dark until about midnight; from midnight until cockcrow, which was probably about two or three o'clock; and from then until dawn. The watchman in the morning watch was the one who announced the dawn. The Romans had the night divided into four watches.

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<sup>38</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 3:15). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

We might think that the practice of having watchmen belongs to a backward age and a day that is past, that at the dawn of civilization it was satisfactory but it's not needed today. However, we are finding out again that we need watchmen. The police who patrol all during the night in our cities are watchmen. I personally feel they should have more support from the citizens and from the legal profession. We should stand behind them. I know that some of them individually are not what they should be, but we should respect their office and respect the fact that they do protect us during the night. But if we continue on the lawless path on which we are now, I am afraid that the day will come when they will not be able to help us at all.

The Book of Isaiah teaches us that the watchman had not only a responsibility, but also a visibility. He was to be able to distinguish the enemy out there in the darkness. Today, the minister is to be the watchman for his community. He should be able to give a warning of danger—he is *responsible* to give, that type of message.<sup>39</sup>

The Israelites who had been exiled to Babylon lived in **Tel Abib**, meaning “hill of flood.” **Seven days** is the time normally taken for mourning the dead, as well as the time set aside for a priest’s consecration (Gen. 50:10; Lev. 8:33). Ezekiel sat **astonished** with these captives for seven days as evidence that he had experienced a unique encounter with God (see Job 2:13). At the end of the seven days Ezekiel would be ordained for the priesthood and would be ready to proclaim mourning for Israel.<sup>40</sup>

**ESV: 14–15** The Vision Concludes. In language echoing 1:1–3, Ezekiel's visionary encounter with the Spirit draws to an end. It is tempting to think of going **in bitterness in the heat of my spirit** simply as a state of agitation following this traumatic encounter, and the translation “in the heat” leaves open this possibility. But this idiom appears 30 times in the OT, and the esv generally translates it “in wrath” or “in fury” or the like. Probably this nuance also applies here. Ezekiel has gained a divine perspective on his people's sin, and his anger reflects that shared viewpoint.

Although no “transportation” was narrated in the course of the vision that began by the Chebar canal (see note on 1:1), Ezekiel knows himself to have been elsewhere. The seven days of recovery echo the time of Job's recovery from tragedy before he finds his voice (Job 2:13). The term Tel-abib means “mound of the flood,” but its precise location has not been determined. It was near the “Chebar canal,” and therefore it should not be confused with modern Tel Aviv in Israel.

**Chuck Smith:** So he comes to the east of the captives, there at Telabib, and he's just astonished by what he sees. And he just sits there for seven days in silence, sort of overawed and astonished.

Now you remember when Job was having all of his difficulties and his friends came to comfort him, for seven days they didn't say a word. They just sat there in silence until Job opened up his mouth and began to complain about his condition. Sitting in silence. So

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<sup>39</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 3:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>40</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

here is Ezekiel doing much the same thing, just sitting in silence as he observes this whole scene of these people.

**Constable:** Ezekiel physically traveled to the Jewish exiles who were living by the Chebar River at the Tel-abib settlement (lit. "hill of ears"). Since "Tel" can mean "ruined mound," it is possible that the Jewish exiles lived at the site of a destroyed or abandoned city. The Babylonians may have situated them there to rebuild and repopulate the site and to reclaim its land

When Ezekiel arrived, he sat for seven days among the exiles, and his presence disturbed them. Seven days was the length of time that the Jews usually mourned for their dead (Gen. 50:10; Num. 19:11; Job 2:13), and it was the time it took to consecrate a priest (Lev. 8:33).

"Ezekiel was being consecrated for the priesthood on his thirtieth birthday and commissioned to proclaim Judah's funeral dirge."<sup>41</sup>

"For a week he struggles inwardly with Yahweh, with his calling, and with the message he is charged to proclaim. Whatever the prophet's relationship to the rest of the exiles in the past, when he finally submits, he is a man set apart, under orders from God. Hereafter his people could expect no more idle or mundane chatter from him. His call to prophetic ministry was not only an invitation to be the spokesman for the glorious God of Israel; it also involved a sentence to a life of loneliness, alienation, and desolation. Physically he lived among his own people, but spiritually he would operate in another realm, a zone governed by divine realities."<sup>42</sup>

**Jewish Study Bible:** Initial commission as a watchman and related symbolic actions.

This section presents oracles and symbolic actions that are concerned with the destruction of Jerusalem and fall of Judah. Although many scholars separate the accounts of Ezekiel's symbolic action in Chas 4-5 from the accounts concerning his role as watchman (3:16-21) and his dumbness (3:22-27), these narratives provide an introduction to chs 4-5 by emphasizing Ezekiel's identity as a Zadokite priest. Chs 4-5 also continue the divine instruction speech that begins in 3:22-27.

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<sup>41</sup> Alexander, "Ezekiel" p. 764

<sup>42</sup> Block, The Book ... p. 138

## **Ezekiel 3:16**

**And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,**

**16-21 Humanity, Responsibility**—A part of an individual's responsibility to God is to share His Word with those who have not heard. Ignoring the responsibility makes a person liable to God for that failure.

**Sin, Rebellion**—To refuse to warn sinners of the consequence of sin is sin, bringing God's judgment as strongly as the original sin. Wickedness brings death. See note on Ps 10:1-18.

**Election, Responsibility**—Ezekiel was given responsibility as a prophet to be a watchman to warn both the wicked and the righteous. He was to prophesy not only to the nation but also to individuals. As a prophet, he was accountable for the souls he was called to warn. Election to a task for God brings responsibility and accountability before God. Election is not a free ride on God's grace. It is a responsible service in God's mission.<sup>43</sup>

**ESV:** The Watchman. Ezekiel is assigned duty as an early warning system for Judah. This role is rehearsed and elaborated in 33:1–9, the passage introducing the second phase of Ezekiel's ministry. The task of watchman is also found in Isaiah (Isa. 21:6–9), Hosea (Hos. 9:8), and Habakkuk (Hab. 2:1), but none provides a direct parallel to Ezekiel's commission (see 2 Sam. 18:24–27; 2 Kings 9:17–20). The insistence on speaking only the divine **word** persists from Ezek. 3:10.

**Chuck Smith 16-17:** So God is now calling him, commissioning him. "Look, I've made you a watchman. That's your commission. Your duty is two-fold: number one, hear My word; two, give them My word." Hearing the voice of God, hearing the word of God and then giving forth the word of God. This is always the method of God. There are many people who do not listen to God. Their ear is out of tune, out of frequency. God always uses those who are in touch with Him to reach those who are out of touch with Him. God uses you, in touch with Him, to reach the world out of touch with Him. And that is the primary purpose why you are still here. God has a work for you to do. God is wanting to touch this needy world. God uses those who are in touch with Him to, through them, touch the needy world. "Hear My word, and then speak My word to them."

At the end of these seven days the Lord's word came to Ezekiel. "The word of the Lord came to me" is a key phrase in Ezekiel occurring in 41 verses. It appears in Jeremiah nine times and in Zechariah twice.

**Jewish Study Bible:** God appoints Ezekiel as the watchman for the House of Israel, who is responsible for the lives and moral guidance of the people (Jer 6:17; Hos 9:8). This function corresponds to the fundamental responsibility of the priesthood to teach God's requirements to the people so that they will maintain their holy status (Lev 10:10-11; Deut 33:10; Ezek 44:23; Hag 2:20-23; 2 Chron 15:3cf. Exod 24:12; 2 Kings 12:3). Luke

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<sup>43</sup> Disciple's Study Bible

sentinels posted on city walls to watch for danger (2 Sam 18:24; 2Kings 9:14), gatekeepers are appointed from among the priests to guard the Temple (1 Chron 9:17-27; 26:1-19). This watchman role is developed more fully in cha 33 and is consistent with the role of the prophets, who also watches and warns. The prophet's responsibility to warn the people concerning their wickedness is presented in four cases. If the prophet fails to warn the person then he is responsible for the person's sin. If the person is warned, however, and fails to act righteously or abandons righteousness, then the person is responsible. These principles are further developed in rabbinic culture; where an individual is only fully culpable for a sin after being forewarned.

### **Ezekiel 3:17**

**Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.**

Here Ezekiel is being called to be a watchman. Put yourself in Ezekiel's position as being called to be a witness.

The **watchman** stood on the city wall guarding against any external or internal threat. He would sound an alarm upon sighting impending danger (see 2 Sam. 18:24). God made Ezekiel a spiritual watchman over His people.<sup>44</sup>

#### **[I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel]**

##### **Four Things God Made Ezekiel**

1. I have made your face strong against their faces (Ezekiel 3:8).
2. Your forehead strong against their foreheads.
3. As an adamant harder than flint have I made your forehead (Ezekiel 3:9).
4. I have made you a watchman (Ezekiel 3:17).<sup>45</sup>

**[watchman]** Watchman—one who looks out or sees from a height, with the view to warning of impending danger or to give any information, good or bad (Ezekiel 33:2-7; 1 Samuel 14:16; 2 Samuel 18:24-27; 2 Kings 9:17-20; 2 Kings 17:9; 2 Kings 18:8; Song 3:3; Song 5:7; Psalm 127:1; Isaiah 21:6-12; Isaiah 52:8; Isaiah 56:10; Isaiah 62:6; Jeremiah 6:17; Jeremiah 31:6; Jeremiah 51:12; Hosea 9:8; Micah 7:4). Priests and prophets of the Lord were often called watchmen. Ezekiel was especially distinguished with this title (Ezekiel 3:17; Ezekiel 33:7). The duties of a watchman were threefold:

1. To wait and watch for what God would command and give in warning (Ezekiel 3:17-21).
2. To watch over and superintend the people (Ezekiel 3:17-21; Isaiah 56:10).
3. To warn the people for God (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

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<sup>44</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>45</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

**Clarke: I have made thee a watchman**—The care and welfare of all this people I have laid on thee. Thou must watch for their safety, preach for their edification, and pray for their eternal welfare. And that thou mayest be successful, receive the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

God is particularly jealous lest any words but his own be taught for Divine doctrines. He will not have human creeds, no more than TRADITIONS, taught instead of his own word. No word can be successful in the salvation of sinners but that which comes from God. Every minister of the Gospel should be familiar with his Maker by faith and prayer; God will then hold communion with his spirit; otherwise, what he preaches will be destitute of spirit and life, and his hackneyed texts and sermons, instead of being the bread from heaven, will be like the dry mouldy Gibeonitish crusts.

**LAN: 17-18** A watchman's job was to stand on the city wall and warn the people of approaching danger. Ezekiel's role was to be a spiritual watchman, warning the people of the judgment to come. Some think that "accountable for his blood" means that just as a watchman on the wall would pay with his life if he failed to warn the city of approaching enemies, Ezekiel would have been held accountable if he had refused to warn the people of coming judgment. Others believe this phrase simply means that God would hold Ezekiel responsible.

**17-21** Ezekiel's unique ministry to Israel was to be a divinely appointed "watchman," one who not only warned the nation, but also issued directed warnings to individuals. Every walled city had a watchman to insure its safety and security. It was the duty of the watchman to scan the horizon and sound the alarm for any impending danger. A man measures his responsibility by his knowledge and opportunities. Thus, the "watchman" carried an awesome responsibility. The warning was not only of physical death, but also of spiritual doom. The duties of the spiritual watchman are presented in 33:1-9.<sup>46</sup>

Yahweh told Ezekiel that He had appointed him to a ministry that was similar to that of a watchman who stood sentry and watched for any threat to his city (cf. 2 Sam. 18:24-27; 2 Kings 9:17-20; Jer. 6:17). Whenever Ezekiel received a word from the Lord he was to pass it along to the Israelites (cf. Isa. 56:10; Jer. 6:17; Hos. 9:8).

### **Ezekiel 3:18**

**When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.**

**Dake: [Thou shalt surely die]** Referring to the death penalty for sin. No sinner escapes this penalty unless he repents and is forgiven by God (Mark 16:15; 1 John 1:9). Death was the penalty for original sin (Genesis 2:17), and it is the present penalty for sin under grace as it always was under the law (Romans 1:29-32; Romans 8:12-13; Galatians 4:19-21). When one sins he immediately incurs the penalty of the broken law, and sincere

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<sup>46</sup> Believer's Study Bible

repentance and forgiveness are necessary to avoid the penalty. There is no automatic work of grace offering forgiveness without repentance and putting the sin away by faith in the blood of Christ. Any other way would be a mock of sin and give one a license to continue in it if he wanted to do so. Every time one commits a death-penalty sin it will have the same effect on him. This is why Ezekiel was told to warn the wicked to meet the conditions of grace, or they would be lost (Ezekiel 3:17-21; Ezekiel 18:1-32; Ezekiel 33:1-20).

**Dake: [to save his life]** Twelve great truths here:

1. Death is the penalty for sin, all sin, every sin, regardless of who the person is or what connection with God he used to have (cp. Genesis 2:17; Romans 1:29-32; Romans 6:14-23; Romans 8:12-13; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21).
2. If the prophet does not warn the wicked man and he dies in his sin, his blood will be required of the prophet.
3. If the wicked man is warned and he repents and turns from sin, his life will be saved.
4. If the prophet warns the wicked man and he does not turn from sin, then the prophet is clear from his blood and all responsibility (Ezekiel 3:19).
5. If a wicked man who is warned or not warned does not turn from his sin, he will die in sin—be lost (Ezekiel 3:19).
6. If a righteous man turns from his righteousness, commits sin again, and God lays a stumblingblock before him and he dies in his sin, all his righteousness which he has done will not be remembered (Ezekiel 3:20; Ezekiel 18:24-26; Ezekiel 33:12-13; Romans 8:12-13).
7. If the prophet has warned the righteous man and he remains in righteousness, both he and the prophet will be saved (Ezekiel 3:20-21).
8. If the prophet has not warned the righteous man and he turns from his righteousness to live in sin again, the prophet will be held responsible for his being lost (Ezekiel 3:20).
9. If the righteous man turns from his righteousness to live in sin again, he will be lost if he dies in his sin whether he has been warned or not (Ezekiel 3:20-21; Ezekiel 18:24-26; Ezekiel 33:12-13; Romans 8:12-13; Galatians 5:19-21).
10. The righteous man can and will die in his sins if he goes back into them again and does not repent again (Ezekiel 3:20-21; Ezekiel 18:24-26; Ezekiel 33:12-13; Romans 8:12-13).
11. The righteous man who does die in his sins will be as much lost as he would have been had he never turned from them (Ezekiel 3:20-21; Romans 6:14-23; Romans 8:12-13; Galatians 5:19-21).
12. The only way a righteous man can be saved is by continuing in his righteousness instead of sin (Ezekiel 3:20-21).

**[his blood will I require at thine hand]** To save himself from responsibility of having the blood of a lost man on his hands, the prophet must warn the wicked (Ezekiel 3:18).

**Clarke: Thou shalt surely die**—That is, If he turn not from his wickedness, and thou givest him not warning, as above, he shalt die in his iniquity, which he should not have committed; but his blood will I require at thy hand—I will visit thy soul for the loss of

his. O how awful is this! Hear it, ye priests, ye preachers, ye ministers of the Gospel; ye, especially, who have entered into the ministry for a living, ye who gather a congregation to yourselves that ye may feed upon their fat, and clothe yourselves with their wool; in whose parishes and in whose congregations souls are dying unconverted from day to day, who have never been solemnly warned by you, and to whom you have never shown the way of salvation, probably because ye know nothing of it yourselves! O what a perdition awaits you! To have the blood of every soul that has died in your parishes or in your congregations unconverted laid at your door! To suffer a common damnation for every soul that perishes through your neglect! How many loads of endless wo must such have to bear! Ye take your tithes, your stipends, or your rents, to the last grain, and the last penny; while the souls over whom you made yourselves watchmen have perished, and are perishing, through your neglect. O worthless and hapless men! better for you had ye never been born! Vain is your boast of apostolical authority, while ye do not the work of apostles! Vain your boast of orthodoxy, while ye neither show nor know the way of salvation! Vain your pretensions to a Divine call, when ye do not the work of evangelists! The state of the most wretched of the human race is enviable to that of such ministers, pastors, teachers, and preachers.

But let not this discourage the faithful minister who teaches every man, and warns every man, in all wisdom, that he may present every man perfect to Christ Jesus. If after such teaching and warning they will sin on, and die in their sins, their blood will be upon themselves; but thou, O man of God, hast delivered thine own soul.

**LAN: 18-21** In these verses, God is not talking about loss of salvation but rather about physical death. If the people back in Judah continued in their sins, they and their land and cities would be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's armies. If, on the other hand, the people would turn to God, God would spare them. God would hold Ezekiel responsible for his fellow Jews if he failed to warn them of the consequences of their sins. All people are individually responsible to God, but believers have a special responsibility to warn unbelievers of the consequences of rejecting God. If we fail to do this, God will hold us responsible for what happens to them. This should motivate us to begin sharing our faith with others—by both word and deed—and to avoid becoming callous or unconcerned in our attitude.

**Chuck Smith 18-19:** Now, look, I've set you as a watchman, and you are responsible to hear My word and to speak My word. And if I say to the wicked, "You're going to die," if you warn them and they listen, great, they will live. If they don't listen, at least you've delivered your soul. If you don't warn them and they die, then you're responsible. The blood is on your hands.

What does it mean to have the blood on my hands? What does it mean to fail in my service to God? If God is saying to the wicked, "Hey, you better turn," and God uses or calls me to be the spokesman to warn those people that they better turn from their wickedness or God's judgment is coming, and if I fail to do it and God's judgment comes and they're destroyed, what does that mean that their blood is on my hands? It means that God holds me responsible, and that the reward that I would have for faithful service will not be given to me.

Now, notice he wasn't told to convince the wicked to turn. He wasn't told to argue with them. He was only told to declare to them the warning of God. That's all. We so often in our Christian experience make the mistake of thinking that we've got to somehow convert people to Jesus Christ. You can't convert them to Jesus Christ. God doesn't call you to convert people to Jesus Christ. He calls you to warn people. And therein is the calling of God. "I've called you, " He said, "to warn them." You've got to obey it. You've got to be responsible.

If Ezekiel failed to pass along a message of warning to the Israelites, warning them to repent or die, the Lord would hold Ezekiel personally responsible for their fate (cf. ch. 18; 33:1-20).

### **Ezekiel 3:19**

**Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.**

**[Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity]** To save his life the wicked man must turn from his sins and ask forgiveness (Ezekiel 3:18-19).

After **seven days** of silence Ezekiel's solitude was shattered by God's words. God appointed him **a watchman for the house of Israel**. "Watchman" is used several times of prophets (cf. Isa. 56:10; Jer. 6:17; Hosea 9:8). Watchmen were stationed on city walls, hilltops, or specially designed watchtowers. A watchman was to be on the alert for approaching enemies and warn the city's people of any impending attack. This gave city dwellers outside the walls an opportunity to seek protection and gave the people time to secure the gates and man the defenses.

Similarly, as God's watchman, Ezekiel was responsible for sounding the **warning** of impending judgment to Israel. He was to warn both the **wicked** (Ezek. 3:18-19) and the righteous (vv. 20-21). **A wicked person** was to be warned to turn **from his evil ways in order to save his life**. Though both the Old and New Testaments clearly indicate the *spiritual* results of sin, the focus here is on the *physical* consequences. A wicked person who refuses to heed God's warnings **will die for his sin**. Since all are spiritually dead from birth, the obvious reference here is to physical death. As Nebuchadnezzar's armies approached, the **wicked** could expect death at the enemy's hands.<sup>47</sup>

**his blood:** Doubtless, this severe warning given to Ezekiel was similar to that given to a military watchman in ancient times. If the watchman failed to give the alarm to the city in a time of peril, the blood of the city would be required of him. But if the watchman sounded the alarm and the city did not respond, the watchman could hardly be blamed.  
**delivered your soul:** As a faithful watchman, Ezekiel would not have placed his own life

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<sup>47</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 3:16-19). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

in jeopardy by failing in his critical duty. A watchman who was “asleep at the switch” would forfeit his life. The word *soul* often merely means “life” in Hebrew.<sup>48</sup>

If, however, Ezekiel did warn the people and they refused to repent, they would die, but the Lord would not hold Ezekiel responsible.

### **Ezekiel 3:20**

**Again, When a righteous *man* doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand.**

**Dake: [righteousness]**

### **Righteousness Defined**

Some argue that this righteousness is not personal holiness of obedience to the gospel, but mere legal righteousness—the righteousness of the law—and that it does not prove a man to be saved from sin, or born again. However, this is but human theory. If it was the righteousness of the law, that is what must be fulfilled in those who are born again (Romans 8:1-4). Whatever the kind of righteousness it was something that:

1. One could turn away from (Ezekiel 3:20).
2. If he did turn from it he committed iniquity or sin.
3. He died if he left it and went into sin (Ezekiel 3:20; Ezekiel 18:24-26; Ezekiel 33:13,18).
4. It would not be remembered if he did turn from it to commit sin (Ezekiel 3:20).
5. It gave him life as long as he kept it and did not turn from it to commit sin (Ezekiel 3:21; Ezekiel 18:24).
6. He had it until he did sin (Ezekiel 3:21).
7. It would not deliver him from death if he left it; but if he kept it he lived (Ezekiel 33:12).

We have to conclude that if it had the power of life and death in it, depending on whether one kept it or not, then the kind of righteousness here is that which God demands in the N.T. of those who are born again (Matthew 6:33; Acts 10:35; Romans 4:3-22; Romans 6:13-20; Romans 8:4; 1 Peter 2:24). We have no authority to make this righteousness different from what God has always demanded, in both testaments. God requires us to fulfill the righteousness that the law demanded (Romans 8:4), so if a person was righteousness under the law for keeping it and one is righteous under grace for keeping it, then what is the difference? If all have been required to live by it, in either testament, then all must have it, or be lost (Ezekiel 3:20; Ezekiel 18:24-26; Ezekiel 33:12-13; Jeremiah 22:3; Jeremiah 33:15; Hosea 10:12).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>49</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

**[he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered]** To continue to live the righteous man must not return to sin or die in sin (Ezekiel 3:20-21).

**Clarke: When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness**—Which these words plainly state he may do, and commit iniquity and die in his sin; and consequently die eternally, which is also here granted; if he have not been warned, though he die in his sin, the blood—the life and salvation, of this person also will God require at the watchman’s hand. “This man the pastor kills; for in being silent, he delivers him over to death.”—GREGORY. From these passages we see that a righteous man may fall from grace, and perish everlastingly. Should it be said that it means the self-righteous, I reply, this is absurd; for self-righteousness is a fall itself, and the sooner a man falls from it the better for himself. Real, genuine righteousness of heart and life is that which is meant. Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall.

**Clarke: And I lay a stumbling-block before him**—That is, I permit him to be tried, and he fall in the trial. God is repeatedly represented as doing things which he only permits to be done. He lays a stumbling-block, i.e., he permits one to be laid.

**I lay a stumbling-block**—not that God tempts to sin (Jam 1:13, 14), but God gives men over to judicial blindness, and to *their own* corruptions (Ps 9:16, 17; 94:23) when they “like not to retain God in their knowledge” (Ro 1:24, 26); just as, on the contrary, God makes “the way of the righteous plain” (Pr 4:11, 12; 15:19), so that they do “not stumble.” CALVIN refers “stumbling-block” not to the *guilt*, but to its *punishment*; “I bring *ruin* on him.” The former is best. Ahab, after a kind of righteousness (1Ki 21:27–29), relapsed and consulted lying spirits in false prophets; so God permitted one of these to be his “stumbling-block,” both to sin and its corresponding punishment (1Ki 22:21–23).<sup>50</sup>

Both the wicked and the righteous must accept responsibility for their sins and the consequences thereof. The phrase “he shall die in his sin,” as referring to the righteous man, means that he shall die “by” or “because of” his sin. The death described is physical, and the emphasis is upon the physical consequences of sin. These physical consequences are the same for saved and lost alike. However, note that the wicked man dies “in” or “by” his iniquity or perverseness (v. 19). This verse does not present a doctrine of “falling from grace.” The righteous man does not lose his salvation, but he may forfeit his health, reputation, physical life, and finally, his rewards, as the result of sin (cf. 1 Cor 3:15). The theme of individual responsibility for sin is taken up in more detail in 18:1ff. (cf. 18:2, 18:20).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 3:20). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>51</sup> Believer’s Study Bible

19-21 **Salvation, Definition**—The apostle Paul took this passage seriously (Ac 18:6; 20:26). Compare Jas 5:19-20. God’s people are to watch over themselves and others and warn persons of the dire consequences of their sins. We cannot save ourselves, nor can we save others through warnings or any other good work. God will use our warnings to turn us and others from wickedness and sin (Eph 2:8-10). Persons are free to accept or reject salvation. Failure to let other people know the “wages of sin” (Ro 6:23) is sin.<sup>52</sup>

This verse illustrates the individual/corporate tension in moral responsibility for God’s people. The individual carries an ethical obligation toward righteousness. The community has an obligation as well to aid the individual toward righteousness. The community must bear some of the blame and guilt when one of its individuals exhibits ethical failure.

In other words, here's a guy turned from God, going down the wrong path, and God puts the stumblingblock that's going to trip him into hell.

**Chuck Smith:** There are many who have made a profession, and there are many today who do profess to be Christians, but whose lives are being lived after the flesh. And I don't care what profession you might make. John surely warns us that there are people who are making false professions. "He that saith he is in the light, and walks in darkness lies. He doesn't know the truth. He that says he has no sin deceives himself. God's truth isn't in him. If a man say... " and men say a lot of things, but there's got to be a corresponding action in his life. If I say I'm walking in the light, and yet I am living after the flesh and walking in darkness, I'm only deceiving myself. The truth isn't in me. And there are a lot of people who have deceived themselves because they have made verbal professions of faith, but there is no fruit in their life to indicate any change. And they are still living and walking after the flesh. And yet, the Word of God plainly warns us concerning those works of the flesh.

As Paul said, "For the works of the flesh are manifest which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strifes, seditions, heresy, envyings, murder, drunkenness, revelry, and such like of which I tell you. I've told you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). Now I don't care what profession you've made. If you're living and walking after the flesh, if you are living in the practice of sin, opposed to God, I don't care what righteous things you may have done. Your very life is denying Jesus Christ and faith in Jesus Christ, through which faith God imputes righteousness to us. But your very life denies Him, and you're going to perish in your sin.

And God is commissioning Ezekiel to warn the people of the truth of God. "That's what you got to do, Ezekiel, and once you do, you've delivered your soul." And I'm warning you, as the servant of God, according to the Word of God and my understanding of the Word of God, if you continually are living after the flesh, not walking after the Spirit, not being led by the Spirit, not seeking the things of the Spirit, it makes no difference what profession you may have made, your life is denying Christ. And many people have been lulled into a false sense of security by false prophets who encourage them to just live

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<sup>52</sup> Disciple’s Study Bible

however you want. It doesn't really matter. "Just send your offering in and things will be okay." Don't believe them.

**Constable:** Similarly if a righteous person turned to sin and Ezekiel failed to warn him of its consequences, even though the Lord would put him to death, the Lord would hold Ezekiel responsible for not warning him. The obstacle that the Lord promised to put in the path of the righteous man who had turned aside to sin was the warning that Ezekiel should provide.

"The saint needs the watchman's warnings as much as the sinner does."<sup>53</sup>

### **Ezekiel 3:21**

**Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous *man*, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.**

**Missler:** See other "watchman" passages: 2 Sam 18:24-27; and 2 Kings 9:17-20 which describe the role of the watchman. The main issue of a watchman was not to deliver results, but to give warning. What those warned do with that warning is not your responsibility. The role of the watchman is an information role. We should remember that. It is not our objective to turn others around; that is the job of the Holy Spirit. Our job is to be a witness.

Ezekiel 33:1-2 is a parallel passage. Remember also Acts 18:4-6 and 20:17-22, as Paul probably had these passages in mind when he got into some of those issues.

### **The Call to Individuals (Missler):**

Comparing this passage to some of the other prophets (see Hab 2, Jer 6, and Isa 56) we see that they saw that their mission had a national or corporate purpose. They were to expect a reaction on the part of the Nation.

Ezekiel's call was to the individual. Compare with the letter to Laodicea. In all the letters to the Churches (Rev 2 and 3), Jesus was saying something good and something critical.... When He got to Laodicea and reached the place in the letter structurally where there is the call to the Church, there is no call to the Church. Instead, in Rev 3:20, He says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

That verse is a tremendous verse used by many evangelists as a personal call. However, where it sits in context, it is a scathing indictment of the Laodicean Church, because structurally that is the point in all the other letters where there was a promise to the entire Church. For Laodicea it was only to individuals. The tone which comes across is that the Laodicean Church was dead. Here in Ezekiel that challenge was also to the individual. It again reinforces the concept of what God said earlier - that the Nation

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<sup>53</sup> Taylor p. 69

would not repent. Despite all his preaching and all the things he was going to go through, they were going to stay in idolatry as a nation, and thus, go into further judgment with Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

**Constable:** On the other hand, if Ezekiel warned a righteous person and he heeded the warning, he would live, and Ezekiel would be free of any guilt before the Lord.

"The duties of Habakkuk (Hab. 2:1), Jeremiah (Jer. 6:17), and Isaiah (Isa. 56:10) were far more national and corporate than individual. Ezekiel realized that from that time on his would be a mission mainly to individuals."

"The responsibility of a believer in Christ today to share the word of life, salvation, and forgiveness is no less awesome. Once the message of salvation is entrusted to us, we are responsible and accountable to share with those who are lost."

The Mosaic Law promised life for obedience and death for disobedience. This was physical life and physical death, not eternal life and death. The Lord gave the Mosaic Law to a people who had already entered into relationship with Himself by faith (cf. Lev. 18:5; Deut. 4:37-40; 6; 7:6-11; 10:15-17; 30:15-20; see also Exod. 19:8; 24:3, 7; Deut. 5:27). The possibility here is premature physical death or extended physical life. Eternal life and eternal security are not the issues.

### **Ezekiel 3:22**

**And the hand of the LORD was there upon me; and he said unto me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee.**

The hand of the Lord upon him again, meaning he was gripped by the Hand of God.

**[the hand of the LORD was there upon me]** See note Ezekiel 3:14, above.

**Clarke: Arise, go forth into the plain**—Into a place remote from observation and noise; a place where the glory of God might have sufficient room to manifest itself, that the prophet might see all its movements distinctly.

**22-27:** The "hand," i.e., power, of God came upon Ezekiel. He was directed to go out to the plain. There God would communicate to him his message. When Ezekiel went out to the plain he saw that "the glory of the Lord was standing there." This second appearance of the *merkabah* engendered in the prophet the same response as the first. He fell on his face in reverence. Again the Spirit entered him and made him stand up to hear what God would say. The command of the Lord was strange indeed: "Go shut yourself up in your house." This man was to make himself a prisoner! (3:22–24).

Ezekiel was told that his fellow captives would put ropes on him and bind him with them, "so that he could not go out among them" (3:25). Is this warning to be understood literally? Perhaps the captives thought that he was insane and so they restrained him for a time in his house. Perhaps this refers to a persecution of the prophet (cf. Jer 20; 29:26). Others understand the warning metaphorically. By their unbelief and hostility the captives restricted the freedom with which Ezekiel could conduct his ministry. Or again,

they tried to imprison him to their way of thinking. Ezekiel, however, was to be a prisoner of the word of God, not to the whims of men.

God then declared that he would make Ezekiel's tongue "stick to the roof" of his mouth. The prophet would be "dumb," unable to rebuke the exiles because they were a rebellious house. From time to time God would speak to Ezekiel. In such an event Ezekiel was to present that word to his audience as a "thus says the Lord God." His audience would then have the freedom to hear, i.e., obey the prophetic word, or to refuse it. Most would choose the latter alternative because they were "a rebellious house" (3:26f.).

Some understand these words to mean that Ezekiel experienced a literal period of silence in his ministry. The passage seems to say that Ezekiel would communicate with his fellow exiles only at such times as he received a divine communication. The fetters symbolically represented this restraint which God placed on Ezekiel. This restraint is removed in 33:22.

Bert Hall offers an effective summary of the commissioning of Ezekiel by paraphrasing the commands given to him in this unit:

1. "Go, and speak" (3:4).
2. "Go, and sit" (3:11).
3. "Go, and watch" (3:17).
4. "Go, and wait" (3:24).<sup>54</sup>

**Jewish Study Bible:** The conditions of Ezekiel's mission: isolation and silence. The meaning of this silence is unclear, but may suggest that Ezekiel must be silent except when he is speaking the divine word.

### **Ezekiel 3:23**

**Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the LORD stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face.**

**[the glory of the LORD stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar]**

The third vision of the glory of God (Ezekiel 1:4; Ezekiel 3:12-13,22-23).

**[I fell on my face]** He fell on his face six times (Ezekiel 3:23; Ezekiel 1:28; Ezekiel 9:8; Ezekiel 11:13; Ezekiel 43:3; Ezekiel 44:4).

**LAN:** Ezekiel recognized his helplessness before God and fell facedown in his presence. Sometimes our prosperity, popularity, or physical strength blind us to our spiritual helplessness. But nothing we do on our own can accomplish much for God. Only when God is in control of our wills can we accomplish great tasks for him. The first step to being God's person is to admit that you need his help; then you can begin to see what God can really do in your life.

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<sup>54</sup> Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 3:22–27). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

**McGee:** The subject of the glory of God will appear again and again in the Book of Ezekiel. What is *glory*, by the way? Some will say that glory is something you cannot see, that it is intangible. I feel that is entirely wrong. Glory is something that produces a sensation on all five of our senses. Glory has size. How big is it? Is it long or square or round? May I say, glory has the size of the infinity of space. The Word of God tells us, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). The glory of God is seen in this tremendous universe that you and I live in. Glory also has a beauty to it: "... whose glorious beauty is a fading flower ..." (Isa. 28:1). Glory is beautiful. My heaven is going to be a beautiful place. How lovely it's going to be! Glory has to do with adornment. We read in Scripture that He was "... glorious in his apparel ..." (Isa. 63:1). He is really dressed up and lovely in the garb that he wears. There is a majesty about glory. Psalm 8:1 declares, "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens." This is the majesty of God; it is bright and light, precious and pure. Finally, glory also sets forth honor and dignity. Daniel said, "O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour" (Dan. 5:18). The very name of God suggests His dignity, His glory. Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord.<sup>55</sup>

**Chuck Smith:** God isn't limited to one locality. He's everywhere, and He's in the plain as well as by the river. And sometimes He will give directions and will allow you to do things one way, but then other times it's different ways. Our problem is that we try to pattern God. "Well, now, this is the way that God did it before," as though God has to continue in the same pattern. And we oftentimes make mistakes of thinking that God is patterned and God is bound to one method or one way. And we as men so easily fall into that rut of trying to do, "Well, this is the way, you know, they did it. This is the way our fathers did it." You know, and we get in these ruts. And that's one of the problems with the church. It's so filled with "rutuals" that it doesn't communicate to people anymore.

Ezekiel obeyed the Lord. While he was standing on the plain, he saw another vision of God's glory and again prostrated himself on the ground (cf. 1:28; Acts 7:55).

### **Ezekiel 3:24**

**Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house.**

[entered into me] The Spirit entered into him again (Ezekiel 2:2).

**Clarke: The spirit—said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house—**Hide thyself for the present. The reason is immediately subjoined.

**LAN: 24-27** Ezekiel was allowed to speak only when God had a message for the people. Thus the people knew that whatever Ezekiel said was God's message. They did not have to wonder whether Ezekiel was speaking by God's authority or his own.

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<sup>55</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 3:23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Soon after Ezekiel was commissioned as a prophet, he was commanded by God to refrain from public ministry (v. 24). When the people refused to hear God's message, the prophet was instructed not to speak. During this period of silence (seven and one-half years; cf. dates in 1:1-3 with 33:21, 22) the prophet did speak when God gave him specific messages for the people and instructed him to declare them (see v. 27). The silence lasted until the fall of Jerusalem (33:21, 22).<sup>56</sup>

Ezekiel wrote more of the indwelling of God's **Spirit** than any of the prophets.

Notice, He's always setting him on his feet. It's interesting, he's always falling on his face every time he sees the glory of the Lord, falls on his face, and then the Spirit comes along and sets him up on his feet.

**Constable:** The Spirit then strengthened Ezekiel to stand up, and the Lord instructed him to go back to his house and shut himself up in it. "For a sovereign to invite a suppliant to stand meant that he at least was willing to do business with him."

**Jewish Study Bible:** Shut yourself up ... you shall not go out: Ezekiel's isolation resembles that of Moses, who spoke directly to God as an oracle diviner in the Tent of Meeting (Exod 33:7-11; 34:35; Num 11) and the high priest, who appears alone before God and the Ark at Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement (Lev 16).

### **Ezekiel 3:25**

**But thou, O son of man, behold, they shall put bands upon thee, and shall bind thee with them, and thou shalt not go out among them:**

**Clarke:** **They shall put bands upon thee**—Thy countrymen will rise up against thee; and, to prevent thy prophesying, will confine thee.

**Dake:** [**But thou, O son of man, behold, they shall put bands upon thee, and shall bind thee with them, and thou shalt not go out among them ...**] The second prophecy in Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3:25-27, fulfilled). The next prophecy is in Ezekiel 4:1.

Three Predictions—Fulfilled:

1. They (your own people) will put bands upon you, and will bind you with them (Ezekiel 3:25)
2. I will make your tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth so that you will be muted and not a reprover of them (Ezekiel 3:26)
3. When I speak with you I will open your mouth, and you will then speak My words to them (Ezekiel 3:27)

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<sup>56</sup> Believer's Study Bible

**ESV: 25–27** Ezekiel has already ingested the message (vv. 1–3) and absorbed the divine perspective (v. 14). His identification with the prophetic message is pushed even further, with his actions and words under direct divine control. Ezekiel will be mute until Jerusalem's fall (see 33:22). Such constraint raises the problem: how will he warn if he cannot speak? The solution: oracles of God will be divinely enabled—I will open your mouth. The concluding words are familiar, echoing the terms of the divine commission in 2:4, 7.

This final piece of the complex vision sequence comes as something of an aftershock in the wake of the main event, with several direct parallels to the earlier vision.

Now, go, set yourself in the house. But they're going to come and bind you there.

### **Ezekiel 3:26**

**And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they *are* a rebellious house.**

**Dake: [And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb]**

#### **Twenty-five Pantomimes of Ezekiel**

1. The sign of dumbness (Ezekiel 3:26)
2. The sign of the tile (Ezekiel 4:1-2)
3. The sign of the iron pan (Ezekiel 4:3)
4. The sign of lying on left side (Ezekiel 4:4-5)
5. The sign of lying on right side (Ezekiel 4:6)
6. The sign of the bare arm (Ezekiel 4:7)
7. The sign of being bound (Ezekiel 4:8. Cp. Ezekiel 3:25)
8. The sign of eating unclean bread and water by measure 390 days (Ezekiel 4:9-13)
9. The sign of eating unclean food by measure 40 days (Ezekiel 4:4-17)
10. The sign of the barber's razor and weighing hair (Ezekiel 5:1-17)
11. The sign of prophesying to the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 6:1-10)
12. The sign of smiting hands and stamping with the feet (Ezekiel 6:11-14)
13. The sign of making a chain (Ezekiel 7:23-27)
14. The sign of moving and digging through the wall (Ezekiel 12:1-16)
15. The sign of eating and drinking while shaking and trembling (Ezekiel 12:17-18)
16. The sign of the fire in the forest (Ezekiel 20:45-49)
17. The sign of the drawn sword (Ezekiel 21:1-5)
18. The sign of sighing (Ezekiel 21:6-7)
19. The sign of crying and howling (Ezekiel 21:12-13)
20. The sign of smiting the hands (Ezekiel 21:14-23)
21. The sign of the boiling pot (Ezekiel 24:1-14)
22. The sign of wife dying (Ezekiel 24:15-27)
23. The sign of wailing (Ezekiel 32:17-21)
24. The sign of prophesying to bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14)
25. The sign of the two sticks (Ezekiel 37:15-25)

### Fifteen Other Pantomimes of Scripture:

1. The sign of tearing Jeroboam's garment into 12 pieces (1 Kings 11:30-40)
2. The sign of the bow and arrows (2 Kings 13:15-19)
3. The sign of Isaiah walking naked and barefoot for 3 years (Isaiah 20:1-6)
4. The sign of the linen girdle (Jeremiah 13:1-14)
5. The sign of the potter's house (Jeremiah 18)
6. The sign of the broken pottery (Jeremiah 19)
7. The sign of the wine cup (Jeremiah 25:15-38)
8. The sign of the yokes (Jeremiah 27-28)
9. The sign of the hidden stones (Jeremiah 43:8-13)
10. The sign of casting a stone and a book into the river Euphrates (Jeremiah 51:62-64)
11. The sign of the prophet marrying a prostitute (Hosea 1:2-11)
12. The sign of pleading children (Hosea 2)
13. The sign of renewed love (Hosea 3)
14. The sign of binding Paul with his own girdle (Acts 21:10-13)
15. The sign of the great millstone being cast into sea (Rev. 18:21)<sup>57</sup>

**Clarke: I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth**—I will not give thee any message to deliver to them. They are so rebellious, it is useless to give them farther warning.

Now, I'm going to smite you with dumbness. You're not going to be able to talk to them. Now, he's just been commissioned to tell them, but for a period now he's not going to be able to speak.

The phrase **not be one to rebuke them** qualified what was meant by Ezekiel's being **mute**. The idea may be better stated as "not be a legal mediator." During his "mute" period, Ezekiel would not be allowed to speak as a mediator on behalf of the people before God, their Judge.<sup>58</sup>

The Lord would make Ezekiel unable to speak or to rebuke the people because they were rebellious against the Lord. The prophet's silence would be their punishment; he would not be able to warn them of judgment that the Lord would bring on them. Ezekiel could have given them many more warnings than he did.

**Jewish Study Bible:** God prevents Ezekiel from carrying out his role as one who warns Israel. Like Balaam in Numbers chapters 22-24, he cannot speak except for what God tells him.

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<sup>57</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

<sup>58</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

### **Ezekiel 3:27**

**But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbeareth, let him forbear: for they *are* a rebellious house.**

Ezekiel started his ministry in silence. Saul also started his ministry in silence (at Damascus). Here Ezekiel is struck dumb except as the Lord elects to speak through him. The Babylonian captivity actually took place in three sieges, but it had been extensively prophesied well in advance (Isa 29:5-7 and Jer 25:8-12). Daniel, who had been taken captive as a teenager in the first of the three sieges, came to know from reading the Jeremiah prophecy that the captivity would last for 70 years. That is when he went into prayer and received the famous 70 week vision of Daniel 9.

**Clarke: I will open thy mouth**—When it is necessary to address them again, thou shalt sum up what thou hast said in this one speech: Thus saith the Lord, “He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbeareth, let him forbear.” Let him who feels obedience to the voice of God his interest, be steadfast. Let him who disregards the Divine monition go in his own way, and abide the consequences.

**He who hears, let him hear:** Jesus used this warning often in His teaching (see Mark 4:23). The phrasing emphasizes individual responsibility and readiness to accept the divine message.

**Chuck Smith:** Now remember over and over in the New Testament Jesus said, "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear." Now, this was to impress upon Ezekiel the fact that he wasn't to just blurt out his own ideas to these people, but he was to wait until God spoke, and when God spoke then he was to speak. But not before. And to insure it, God was just going to smite him with dumbness so he couldn't. Sometimes I wish God would smite me with dumbness. I wish I could take back some of the things I have said.

**Constable:** Finally the Lord would enable Ezekiel to speak again. He would announce a message from the Lord. Some of his hearers would listen, but others of them would refuse to listen because they were rebels against the Lord. Nevertheless, regardless of their response, the hearers would be personally responsible for their response (cf. Matt. 11:15; 13:10-17; Rev. 2:7; 13:9; 22:11; et al.).

Evidently Ezekiel's muteness lasted for several years, until the fall of Jerusalem (cf. 1:1-3; 24:25-27; 33:21-22).<sup>113</sup> He was not entirely silent during this several-year period, from the present until Jerusalem fell, but he only spoke to the people when God gave him special messages to deliver (cf. 11:25; 14:1; 20:1). Rather than speaking publicly from time to time as he lived among the people, as other prophets normally did, Ezekiel remained at home except to deliver special messages from the Lord (cf. chs. 4—5). Thus Ezekiel spoke less publicly and led a more reclusive life than the Lord's other prophetic spokesmen. Another view is that Ezekiel's period of silence ended with the conclusion of his commissioning.

"From that moment onwards, Ezekiel was to be known as nothing but the mouthpiece of Yahweh. When he spoke, it was because God had something to say; when he was silent, it was because God was silent."

"His speech is to be intermittent and limited to judgment oracles."

"Ezekiel . . . has to experience the inability to speak . . . as a forceful experiential reminder of the fact that he has no authority to make up on his own what he says to his fellow Israelites. Rather, only God can, as it were, loose his tongue. He must let God speak through him, and not invent anything himself or take his message from anyone else. Originality is usually prized among writers and speakers. Yet there was to be no originality in Ezekiel's doctrine. In all five commissions [2:1—3:27] he is reminded that his job is to convey and not to create."

We have the same duty (Matt. 28:19-20).