



Book of Ezekiel

Chapter 33

Theme: Recommission of Ezekiel

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Theme: Recommission of Ezekiel

Missler Background Summary: Ezekiel was trained as a priest, but called to the office of a prophet, so he was somewhat of a mystic, an interesting guy. He was in captivity in Babylon, and several hundred mile back home, the city of Jerusalem was about to be sieged for the third and final time, falling at last under the Babylonian captivity.

Ezekiel's prophecies, while uttered in Babylon, were directed in large measure to those who were still back in Judah, who just did not understand that God was going to use the Babylonians to judge them for their sins. Finally, he was forbidden to speak to his people any more about that until he got the message that Jerusalem had indeed fallen. For those of you who like to deal in seven-year prophecies, that imposed silence lasted for 7 years! Meanwhile he spoke prophecies of judgments on the surrounding nations, as we have seen in the last few chapters.¹

Review

The first section of Ezekiel was basically 24 chapters of God warning the Jews in Jerusalem what would befall them if they didn't repent. They didn't, and the city was put to siege.

Then, for the last eight chapters, He was telling Ezekiel about the judgments which would befall the seven nations surrounding Israel.

Now, the book begins a third and section - one in which the Lord will spend time focusing on the future of Israel. But there are some matters to take care of first...

Now as we get into chapter 33 God now begins to instruct those captives who are in Babylon.

Missler The Watchman Chapter 33: Chapter 33 is sometimes called the Watchman Chapter. It is going to focus on the human responsibility towards God's law and the necessity for repentance.

The watchman is typically someone you put on the city wall or in a tower to warn of an impending threat. The watchman's job was in a sense finished once he had warned of what was coming. If he did not warn you, he did not do his job, and he had a burden of responsibility. But once he had passed the message to you, it was not his job to defend you; that was your job.²

Constable: Future Blessing for Israel Chs. 33-48:

This last major division of the book focuses on the restoration of Israel's blessing. Israel would be judged for her sin (chaps. 1—24), as would the surrounding nations (chaps. 25—32). But Israel will not remain under judgment forever. God had set her apart as His special people, and He will fulfill His promises to her.

Chapters 33—39 comprise words of restoration and hope, and chaps. 40—48 present details of the restored community.

Some students prefer to interpret Ezekiel 33—48 idealistically or symbolically, applying these descriptions 'spiritually' to the church today rather than literally to Israel in

¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

² Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

the future. But if we've been interpreting Ezekiel's prophetic word literally up to this point, what right do we have to change our approach and start interpreting his words symbolically? . . .

We must face the fact that both approaches—the symbolical and the literal—present problems to the interpreter, but taking Ezekiel's prophecies at face value seems to present fewer problems. Furthermore, seeing literal fulfillment of these prophecies accomplishes the purpose for which God gave them, the encouragement of the people of Israel.³

Constable, A warning to the Exiles 33:1-20:

Since this message is undated, it may have come to Ezekiel about the same time as the previous two in chapter 32, namely, in the last month of 585 B.C. If so, Ezekiel received it about two months after God gave him the six messages recorded in 33:21—39:29 (cf. 33:21). Perhaps the writer inserted the present message in the text here because its strong encouragement to repent was more typical of Ezekiel's emphasis before news of Jerusalem's fall reached the exiles (v. 21) than it was of his emphasis after they received that news. When the exiles learned that Jerusalem had fallen, Ezekiel's messages changed. Before then he announced judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (chs. 4—24) and proclaimed several messages of judgment on the nations that opposed Israel (chs. 25—32). After that event his messages were more encouragements that God would restore Israel to her land (chs. 33—48).

There are only two dated prophecies after the fall of Jerusalem: 33:21 and 40:1. These texts introduce all the messages from 33:21—48:35, the end of the book. The message in 33:23-33 is an exception; it is a strong call to the Israelites to repent and to recommit to obeying the Mosaic Law. Alexander considered the message in 33:1-20 as the conclusion to the section of oracles against the nations (chs. 25—32).⁴ Most commentators viewed this message as an introduction to the messages promising future blessings for Israel (chs. 33—48). Obviously it serves a transitional (janus) function in the book and looks both ways, backward and forward.⁵

Constable, An exhortation to heed the watchman 33:1-9:

This part of Ezekiel's message of warning to the exiles is similar to 3:16-21. Yahweh recommissioned Ezekiel to his prophetic task (cf. chs. 2—3).

Now that Ezekiel's original ministry of judgment was completed, God appointed him as a 'watchman' for a second time. His message still stressed individual accountability and responsibility, but the focus was now on the Lord's restoration of Israel.

ESV Reminders: On the brink of hope, there is a brief pause to forge links back to chs. 1–24, and to remind Ezekiel and his audience of their mutual responsibilities: 33:1–9 again describes the role of the prophet in terms of the “watchman” seen also in 3:16–21; 33:10–20 offers a different edition of the teaching on individual responsibility seen in 18:21–29.

³ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

⁴ Alexander, "Ezekiel," p. 904.

⁵ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

Clarke Introduction: The prophet, after having addressed several other nations, returns now to his own; previously to which he is told, as on a former occasion, the duty of a watchman, the salvation or ruin of whose soul depends on the manner in which he discharges it. An awful passage indeed; full of important instruction both to such as speak, and to such as hear, the word of God, vv. 1-9. The prophet is then directed what answer to make to the cavils of infidelity and impiety; and to vindicate the equity of the Divine government by declaring the general terms of acceptance with God to be (as told before, chap. 18) without respect of persons; so that the ruin of the finally impenitent must be entirely owing to themselves, vv. 10-20. The prophet receives the news of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, about a year and four months after it happened, according to the opinion of some, who have been led to this conjecture by the date given to this prophecy in the twenty-first verse, as it stands in our common Version: but some of the manuscripts of this prophet consulted by Dr. Kennicott have in this place the ELEVENTH year, which is probably the genuine reading. To check the vain confidence of those who expected to hold out by possessing themselves of its other fastnesses, the utter desolation of all Judea is foretold, vv. 21-29. Ezekiel is informed that among those that attended his instructions were a great number of hypocrites, against whom he delivers a most awful message. When the Lord is destroying these hypocrites, then shall they know that there hath been a prophet among them, vv. 30-33.⁶

This section begins a new direction in Ezekiel's prophecies. Ezekiel is reminded that he is the nation's watchman. Before Jerusalem's fall, he told the people of their punishment and dispersion. Now he is to proclaim the hope of restoration, but even this message does not improve the people's response. They listen to him with curiosity and then live as they please. Today we have the good news of forgiveness, but how easy it is to ignore the message and continue to live sinful lives.

McGee Introduction: Chapter 33 brings us to the last major division of this book. From chapters 33–48 we will see the glory of the Lord and the coming millennial kingdom. Chapter 32 concluded the predictions concerning the nations that were round about Israel. Some of these nations were contiguous to the land of Israel. They were very closely related to them, of course—actually related by blood. These prophecies were given before the destruction of Jerusalem. Now we come to the second part of this prophetic book, which contains Ezekiel's prophecies *after* the fall of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel again is speaking of Jerusalem, and the land of Israel will be his subject, but his message is different. Up to chapter 25 everything pointed to the destruction of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem was destroyed exactly as he had predicted. Now he will look forward to the future of the coming millennial kingdom when the glory of the Lord will be seen again on this earth. That makes this a very interesting section.

Not only is Ezekiel's commission renewed, he will also be commanded for the fact that he has done a good job up to this point. From now on he is going to be speaking to those in captivity, telling them that they are to live in the expectancy of the future. Before, these captives had no hope because of their sins. But in the future, Ezekiel sees hope for the children of Israel.

⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

Today believers also have a hope. It is not anchored in anything that men do here on earth, or in any of the gyrations of psychoanalysis. Our hope today is not a philosophy. It rests upon the Word of God and what He has said will take place in the future. This is the lodestar of the child of God in our day. It is not the same as Israel moving into the Millennium. We are moving actually into the New Jerusalem. This is what is immediately ahead of us as believers.⁷

In this transitional chapter, Ezekiel indicates that the prophet is but the medium through whom the principles of the new kingdom and the mode of entering it are announced. Just as the watchman is to warn the inhabitants of a city concerning danger, so the prophet is to sound out God's warning against sin (vv. 1-9). In response to the people's despair at their chastisements, Ezekiel utters reminders of God's good will and perfect justice (vv. 10-20). The presumptuous survivors of the fall of Jerusalem in Judah will have no future (vv. 21-29), but rather, God's purposes will be worked out through those in exile (vv. 30-33).⁸

Ezekiel 33:1

Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

Constable 1-4: The Lord told Ezekiel to speak to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. He had not spoken messages concerning them for about three years (588-585 B.C.), since the Lord had shut his mouth (24:25-27), though he had uttered five oracles against the nations during that time (29:1-16; 30:20—32:32). He was now to tell them that if the Lord brought war on a land and the people of that land appointed a watchman for them, they would be responsible if they did not heed his warning.

Watchmen stood on the towers of walls in ancient cities and scanned the horizon for approaching enemies. If they saw one coming, they would blow their trumpet, usually a shophar (ram's horn), to warn the people who were farming the lands to take refuge in the city. The figure of blood being on one's head comes from sacrificial practice. The offerer placed his hands on the head of the victim symbolizing the transfer of guilt from the offerer to his substitute.⁹

LAN 1ff: This chapter sets forth a new direction for Ezekiel's prophecies. Up to this point, Ezekiel has pronounced judgment upon Judah (Ezekiel 1-24) and the surrounding evil nations (Ezekiel 25-32) for their sins. After Jerusalem fell, he turned from messages of doom and judgment to messages of comfort, hope, and future restoration for God's people (Ezekiel 33-48). God previously appointed Ezekiel to be a watchman warning the nation of coming judgment (see Ezekiel 3:17-21). Here God appointed him to be a watchman again, but this time to preach a message of hope. There are still sections full of warnings (Ezekiel 33:23-34:10; Ezekiel 36:1-7), but these are part of the larger picture of hope. God will remember to bless those who are faithful to him. We must pay attention to both aspects of Ezekiel's message: warning and promise. Those who persist in rebelling

⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 32:32). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 33:1). Chicago: Moody Press.

⁹ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes.htm>

against God should take warning. Those faithful to God should find encouragement and hope.¹⁰

Ezekiel 33:2

Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman:

watchman: (Heb. *Isaphah*) (3:17; 33:2; 1 Sam. 14:16; Hos. 9:8) H6822: This noun is derived from the verb meaning “to watch in anticipation.” This verb is used to describe the actions of individuals waiting in ambush as they watch for their prey (Ps. 37:32). Watchman was an official military position. They were stationed on the towers of a city and were responsible for spotting approaching armies and sounding the alarm to warn the city (1 Sam. 14:16). The imagery behind the watchman is much like that of the shepherd, though *watchman* as a symbolic title was limited to the office of a prophet (Hos. 9:8). A watchman’s failure was punishable by death. In the case of Ezekiel, punishment would come directly from God if he failed to report to the people the messages God gave him (33:8).

Ron Daniel, A Watchman: The job of the watchman was to stay up on the city wall (2Sam. 18:24) and look (1Sam. 14:16), keeping his eyes open (2Sam. 13:34), and staying awake (Psa. 127:1).

As he made his rounds (Song 3:3), he was to tell what time it was when people inquired of him (Isa. 21:11). He was also supposed to blow the trumpet (Jer. 6:17) and alert people when something eventful was going to happen (2Sam 18:25), telling what they saw (2Kings 9:17), and continue to explain what was happening to those who didn't have his vantage point (2Kings 9:20).

It was a vital job - lives were depending on him. The Lord told Ezekiel that whoever was appointed as a watchman for a people was responsible to sound the alarm when he saw a sword coming upon the land. (This is usually a figure of speech for an attacking enemy.)

Whose Responsibility? The Lord said that if the watchman was faithful to blow the trumpet when he saw the approaching danger, then the people were responsible for themselves. If those people - like the citizens of Connecticut – disregarded the warning, their blood would be upon their own heads. However, if the watchman saw the sword approaching and didn't warn the people, God would hold him personally responsible for their deaths. Their blood would be required from his hand.¹¹

Chuck Smith 2-7: Now God is commissioning Ezekiel to speak His word to the captives, the people of God there in the land of Babylon. And God is holding Ezekiel responsible for speaking the word of God to them. And God likens it unto a watchman that has been set up to warn the people of an impending invasion. If the watchman sees the enemy coming and he blows the trumpet to warn the people, then he has fulfilled his

¹⁰ Life Application Bible Notes on Ezekiel

¹¹ Ron Daniel, Notes on Ezekiel, <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/26-Ezekiel/Ezekiel3301.pdf>

obligation. His responsibility was complete when he blew the trumpet and gave warning. What the people do with the warning is not in the responsibility of the watchman. He cannot help what the people do with the warning that he gave. His job was to give the warning. The people could respond however they wanted to the warning. It was then their responsibility how they responded. And so God said, "Now I have set you like a watchman. If you don't warn them, then you are responsible and I will hold you responsible for them. But if you warn them, then they are responsible for themselves."

In our Christian witnessing, I think that it is important that we realize that we are much like a watchman. God has set us to give a warning unto people. Now, what they do with it is their business. God has not commissioned us, really, to argue people in to the kingdom of heaven, or to pressure or to force people into the kingdom of heaven. God has commissioned us to witness His truth, and what people do with that witness is their business. And I realize that there's nothing I can do beyond witnessing for the Lord. It is interesting to me how that there are some people that when you witness to them it's like they've been waiting for you all their lives. And they're just ready to accept. They are so eager, really, that they don't always even give you the chance to finish your witness. And there are others that you give the same witness to, and it's like it's falling on deaf ears. It's like they don't even hear you. It's like they haven't even heard anything you've said. And it doesn't seem to penetrate at all. It has no effect upon them. Now, this causes me to realize that the Holy Spirit is the one that has to do the work of conviction and the drawing of these people to Jesus Christ. My responsibility is as a watchman just to blow the trumpet, to declare, "The Lord is coming soon." Now what you do with that is your own business.

And so God said to Ezekiel, "Now look, you're like a watchman, Ezekiel. Your responsibility is to give the people My word. That's all. What they do with it after that is their responsibility. But I'm going to hold you responsible to warn them, to give them My word."¹²

ESV 1–9: The Watchman (Reprise). See also 3:16–21. God, prophet, and people are inextricably bound together in these verses. The role of the watchman (33:2, 6, 7) dominates. He must act on what he sees (vv. 3, 6). Yet v. 2 frames the parable of vv. 2–6 about the land itself, and the whole oracle (vv. 2–9) is addressed to your people. They are responsible to attend to the watchman's warnings (vv. 4–5). The watchman must exercise vigilance to discern the actions of God (If I bring the sword ... and if he sees, vv. 2–3), but God himself speaks the divine word to the prophet (v. 7). Verses 7–9 are almost identical to 3:17–19.

On God's own sword, cf. 21:3 and the context there.

The children of your people refers to fellow Israelites in exile with Ezekiel, now including the people of Judah deported to Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar's third invasion.

¹² Chuck Smith, Sermon Notes on Ezekiel, Pastor Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa CA

[speak to the children of thy people ...] Five commands of God in Ezekiel 33:

1. Speak to the children of your people, the children of Israel (Ezekiel 33:2).
2. Hear the word at My mouth and warn them from Me (Ezekiel 33:7).
3. Speak unto the house of Israel (Ezekiel 33:10).
4. Turn you, turn you from your evil ways (Ezekiel 33:11).
5. Say unto them (Ezekiel 33:27).

[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).

Clarke: Son of man—if the people of the land take a man—The first ten verses of this chapter are the same with 3:17-22; and to what is said there on this most important and awful subject I must refer the reader. Here the PEOPLE choose the watchman; there, the Lord appoints him. When God chooses, the people should approve.¹³

McGee 2-3: God reverts to the commission that he gave to Ezekiel at the beginning of his ministry. He likens him to the watchman of a city. In that day most of the cities of importance were protected by walls. Those in authority appointed a watchman to watch for invaders from the top of the wall all during the hours of darkness. I imagine that during the night he would call off the watches with a shout of “All’s well” when there was no moving of an approaching enemy out there in the darkness. The interesting thing is that the false prophets were saying “All’s well” when the enemy was coming. They were too blind to see him. Ezekiel had been a faithful watchman and had given the people warning that the enemy, which was Babylon, was coming.¹⁴

Watchman. Hebrew *sôpeh*, “one who looks out, spies, watches.” Cf. II Sam 18:25; II Kgs 9:17, 18. 3. **Sword.** Cf., 21:1-19. **Trumpet.** See Hos 8:1; Jer 6:1; Neh 4:19, 20. b) Its Application. 33:7-9.¹⁵

OTS: God restated Ezekiel’s primary responsibility as a watchman, i.e., to warn of approaching danger. A man who failed to heed the warning of the watchman was responsible for his own death. The watchman would not be held accountable. On the

¹³ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

¹⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 33:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁵ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 33:2–7). Chicago: Moody Press.

other hand, a watchman who failed to sound the alarm was held accountable for every life lost within the city (33:1–6).

Ezekiel had been appointed by God as a watchman for Israel. When he heard a divine word, he must warn the nation. Failure to warn a wicked man of the consequences of his conduct made the prophetic watchman responsible. The watchman delivered his own soul by sounding forth the divine warning (33:7–9).¹⁶

Ezekiel 33:3

If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people;

Note the responsibility of the people and of the watchman (Ezekiel 33:3-6).

Evil and Suffering, Deserved—The complex chain of responsibility for sin and suffering is clarified here. People are responsible for their own sin. See note on 18:1-32. Sin does not bring irreversible responsibility. God forgives those who repent. Those who do not repent find themselves being destroyed by guilt, evil’s natural results, and God’s punishment. To repent, a person must have a clear understanding of personal guilt and responsibility. God calls His people to stand watch and warn sinners. God’s commission makes us responsible for our sins and gives us responsibility for those we are to warn (Gal 6:1-5).¹⁷

Humanity, Responsibility—Sin against God leads to death. God introduced Ezekiel to a new angle of the relationship. Those entrusted with God’s message of grace are responsible for sharing it. Not to share God’s message is sin. To rest on one’s righteous laurels and quit being righteous is sin. To accuse God continually of injustice is sin. Each person is responsible for personal sin. God invites each of us to turn back to Him in repentance. We are responsible if we do not.¹⁸

Ezekiel 33:4

Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.

Sin, Responsibility—Punishment, destruction, and death are not God’s will for the sinner. God seeks repentance and life, but He lets the sinner choose freely between sin/death and obedience/life.

¹⁶ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 33:1–9). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

¹⁷ Disciple’s Study Bible, Notes on Ezekiel

¹⁸ Disciple’s Study Bible, Notes on Ezekiel

Ezekiel 33:5

He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul.

Missler: So, the watchman sounds, and if someone gets hurt, then that is his own fault. But if the watchman does not sound the alarm, and someone gets clobbered, the watchman will be held responsible.

The role of watchman is seen in the Old Testament in 2 Samuel 18; 2 Kings 9; Jeremiah 4:5-6; Hosea 8:1; Amos 3:6; and Habakkuk 2:1. So sounding the trumpet was a quaint Old Testament phrase, but Paul uses the same idiom in the context of spiritual gifts and witnessing which you and I might be more concerned with, do see 1 Corinthians 14:8.¹⁹

Constable 5-6: The citizen would be responsible for his own death if he failed to heed the warning of the watchman. If he responded to the warning, he could save his life. But if the watchman failed to warn the people, he would be responsible for their deaths.²⁰

Ezekiel 33:6

But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

Now the people are going to be judged for their sin, but the watchman will be held responsible if he doesn't warn them. Ezekiel had warned them; the false prophets had not. Ezekiel had done a good job.²¹

Ezekiel 33:7

So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

Constable 7-9: God reminded Ezekiel that He had appointed him a watchman for the Israelites (cf. 3:17-21; Isa. 21:6-9; Jer. 6:17). He was responsible to deliver the Lord's messages to His people. If Ezekiel failed to warn the people that they would die for their sins, God would hold him responsible for their deaths (cf. Gen. 4:9; 9:5). But if Ezekiel warned the sinners of the consequences of their iniquity and they disregarded his warning, they would die, but God would hold them, not Ezekiel, responsible (cf. Acts 20:26). Ezekiel had carried out his commission faithfully. Chapters 4—24 of this book contain the warnings that he delivered concerning the judgment that God intended to send on Judah and Jerusalem for the people's sins.

¹⁹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

²⁰ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

²¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 33:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Warning others of the consequences of judgment inherent in sin is never a popular assignment. Believers have a duty to be 'watchmen' who warn those who are in the world and are without God of the destructive nature of sin and its final irrevocable result—death and hell (33:1-33). Our responsibility is to warn and proclaim as persuasively as possible, but how the message is received is beyond our control.²²

Ron Daniel 7-9, Ezekiel appointed a Watchman: God told Ezekiel that He was appointing him as a watchman for the house of Israel. If that sounds like a familiar command, it is because God previously said these words to Ezekiel back in chapter three, verses 17 through 19.

Why is God "re-assigning" him with the exact same job? Actually, there is a bit of a difference. In chapter three, God had said that He was appointing Ezekiel as a watchman. But here in chapter 33, He says...

Ezek. 33:2 “...*the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman*”

God had appointed Ezekiel as Israel's watchman, but they wouldn't listen to Ezekiel. They wouldn't acknowledge him as a prophet. They didn't believe he was speaking for God. But they were about to believe. By the time this chapter ends, the people will acknowledge that what he prophesied had come true. They will essentially take him as their watchman.

In the same way that the watchman on the wall was to sound the alarm and keep people informed, Ezekiel is to warn and inform the people about God's actions. He will be absolutely responsible to let them know what God is saying. If they don't pay attention, it's their problem. But if he isn't faithful to tell them, it will be his problem - a life-ending problem.²³

[I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me] The second time Ezekiel was made a watchman to the house of Israel, or the captive Jews in Babylon (Ezekiel 3:17). His responsibility (to God and wicked men) corresponded with the duty of a watchman in any city (Ezekiel 33:3-6 with 7-9).

Ezekiel's duty as a **watchman** is defined. Compare also the responsibility of the elders of the church in the New Testament to “watch” (see Acts 20:31; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

I have set thee a watchman. The prophet receives a new appointment as the watchman of the people. Ezekiel's concept of the seriousness of his task has had a profound effect on all God's servants. Cf. Isa 21:6; 56:10; Jer 6:17; Hab 2:1.

²² Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

²³ Ron Daniel, Notes on Ezekiel, <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/26-Ezekiel/Ezekiel3301.pdf>

Ezekiel 33:8

When I say unto the wicked, O wicked *man*, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

The Lord gave him much the same kind of a commission back at the beginning of the book in the third chapter of Ezekiel.

McGee: The responsibility of the watchman is to warn the wicked that they are going to be judged. Ezekiel was faithful in giving the warning, although the people would not listen to him. To sound the warning was the only way the watchman could clear himself.

Today the man who is teaching the Word of God is not required to get results. Many people say, "Let's get an evangelist who can get *results*." To get people to come forward in a meeting is not of primary importance. The preacher giving the people the Word of God is the important thing. I don't look at the folks who have come forward; I look at the people who walk out after the benediction. Have they been warned? That should be our concern. We have been looking at the wrong crowd. We say, "Oh, So-and-so gave such a sweet gospel invitation, and a lot of sweet people came forward. No decisions were actually made, but we had a movement going on." Oh, my friend, let's make sure that the fellow who hears has been properly warned. If he is not warned, the speaker is held responsible. He will have to answer to God for neglecting his duty.²⁴

Ezekiel 33:9

Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

Missler: The first six verses were sort of an allegorical description of what a watchman did; but now the Lord was laying on Ezekiel this challenge, the commission of being a watchman. That is something you might want to pray about. On the one hand God may open up the opportunity for you to witness to your buddy next door. On the other hand Satan would love to get you on a works trip and put you under some form of legalism. Those who have graduated from Romans 7 Law School know that we are saved by grace and not by works.²⁵

Ezekiel 33:10

Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins *be* upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?

pine away: This phrase means to rot, waste, or dwindle.

²⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 33:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²⁵ Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

Constable 10-11: The Israelites seem to have taken on more personal responsibility for their sufferings than they had earlier (cf. ch. 18). They wondered how they could survive God's judgments. This is the first indication in the book that they were conscious of their own sins. The Lord affirmed again that He took no pleasure in putting people to death for their sins (cf. 18:23, 32). He much preferred for them to turn from their sin and live (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9). He also appealed again to the people to do just that: to repent of their wicked ways and live (cf. 18:30-31).

We must correctly distinguish regret, remorse, and true repentance. Regret is an activity of the mind; whenever we remember what we've done, we ask ourselves, 'Why did I do that?' Remorse includes both the heart and the mind, and we feel disgust and pain, but we don't change our ways. But true repentance includes the mind, the heart, and the will. We change our mind about our sins and agree with what God says about them; we abhor ourselves because of what we have done; and we deliberately turn from our sin and turn to the Lord for His mercy.

When Peter remembered his sin of denying Christ, he repented and sought pardon; when Judas remembered his sin of betraying Christ, he experienced only remorse, and he went out and hanged himself.²⁶

Ron Daniel Turn Back: Previously, the Jews had been complaining that they were being punished for the sins of their fathers (Eze. 18). But now they understand it is their own sin which has brought about God's severe judgments.

Unfortunately, they are beginning to despair. They're beginning to think that there is no way they'll survive. And so the Lord clarifies for them: "What I want you to do is repent. Turn away from your sin, and you'll live. It's as simple as that." If they choose not to turn back, they will be foolishly choosing their deaths.

I love what God says here:

Ezek. 33:11 ..."*I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live...*"

That's what Peter told us as well. He said the Lord is...

2Pet. 3:9 ...*not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*

Many people have died because of their sin. And unfortunately, God is often accused of enjoying it. Of smiting people by the thousands, like some sadistic, hatred-filled, demonic deity. But God says His pleasure comes not from smiting sinners, but from seeing repentance.²⁷

The question, very important question: if our transgressions and our sins be upon us and they are destroying us, how should we then live?

ESV 10–20: Moral Responsibility (Reprise). As the reminders continue, the emphasis falls on the people. This passage parallels that of 18:19–29 (see the notes there), which concluded with a call to repentance (18:30–32). Here, no such call is issued. But the following oracle represents the most important juncture in the prophet's ministry.

²⁶ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

²⁷ Ron Daniel, Notes on Ezekiel, <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/26-Ezekiel/Ezekiel3301.pdf>

Clarke: If our transgressions and our sins be upon us—They are upon us, as a grievous burden, too weighty for us to bear: how then can we live under such a load?

Clarke: We pine away in them—In such circumstances how consoling is that word: “Come unto me, all ye who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!”

LAN 10-12: The exiles were discouraged by their past sins. This is an important turning point in this book—elsewhere in Ezekiel the people had refused to face their sins. Here, they felt heavy guilt for rebelling against God for so many years. Therefore, God assured them of forgiveness if they repented. God *wants* everyone to turn to him. He looks at what we are and will become, not what we have been. God gives you the opportunity to turn to him, if you will take it. Sincerely follow God, and ask him to forgive you when you fail.

we are rotting away in them. I.e., we are wasting away because of the inevitable consequences of our sins. To those feeling this way God gave two words of comfort: God desires men to live, and sin is forgivable.

We pine away. Cf. 4:17; 24:23. 11, 12. Two gracious words are granted to the exiles stunned by the feeling of irrevocable doom: (1) God has **no pleasure in the death of the wicked**, but wants him to **turn from his way and live**. (2) The past is not irrevocable for men, for they are free either to repent or to sin. Cf. 18:21-32.²⁸

OTS 10-20 Message of the Watchman (33:10–20).

The message of the watchman/prophet was to be responsive to the needs of his audience. The captives in Babylon had fallen into the depths of despair because of the news of the siege of Jerusalem. For the first time they acknowledged their transgressions. They attributed their present circumstances to the sins they had committed against their God. They had lost all hope that they would survive as a distinct people (33:10).

Ezekiel’s message was to focus on the hopeful possibilities of repentance. He had good news for those depressed captives, news which was reinforced with a divine oath: “as I live, declares the Lord God.” God did not delight in the death of wicked men! Rather he delighted in the repentance which leads to life. Repentance for the captives was possible, and God appealed for it (33:11).

The message also spoke of responsibility. The basic principle here articulated is this: A man’s past does not of itself determine future relationship with the Lord. The righteousness of the righteous man would not deliver him in the day of his transgression. God’s promises to that man were conditional. Therefore, he dared not trust in his own righteousness. A man who had been living a righteous life might suddenly choose to commit iniquity. In that case his righteousness would not be remembered. He would die in the iniquity which he had done. In God’s view every man is responsible for his present conduct and standing with God (33:12f.). Ezekiel knew nothing of the doctrine of “once in grace always in grace” or “eternal security.”

²⁸ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 33:10). Chicago: Moody Press.

Ezekiel was to speak of the possibility of remission. Threats of judgment upon a wicked man were not irrevocable. A wicked man could respond to the word of God and repent. True repentance would manifest itself in such actions as restoring items which have been illegally retained, restoring items taken by violence, and walking in the statutes of life, i.e., the Law of God. Because God took note of his changed life, that sinner who truly repented would live! His sins would not be remembered against him (33:14–16).

The message was to stress God’s righteousness in his dealings with men. The captives objected that Ezekiel’s doctrine made God out to be inconsistent. The prophet declared that it was men who are inconsistent, not God. Wicked men sometimes do repent, and consequently reap the reward. Righteous men do sometimes backslide and then pay the price. Ezekiel argued that God deals with men as they are in the present, not as they once were, whether good or evil. Furthermore, the Lord declared that he judged men individually: “I will judge each of you according to his ways” (33:17–20). “There is no group insurance against God’s judgment.”²⁹

Ezekiel 33:11

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Missler - Repent: This whole thing, even though obviously the context of Ezekiel here was still the Law, it was still the Old Testament position.

This was a reaffirmation of that which had been covered in Ezekiel Chapter 3. In a sense, the pattern is the same as it is in the New Testament —repentance first, and then mercy.

God is the answer, and their past is not irrevocable. Repentance will bring God’s mercy. That is the message He has here in Ezekiel; and that is the message that we find in the New Testament, expanded and greatly amplified there.

The weakness is in man, not in God’s Law (Exodus 22; Numbers 5; Leviticus 18:5). It is Paul who carries that concept much further and points out in Romans 7 that it is the weakness of the flesh which prevents us from meeting the requirements of the Law. Romans 8:3, Galatians 3:21 and Hebrews 7:19 give an understanding of what the real role of the Law was.³⁰

God does not take pleasure in the administration of judgment, but would rather give life and bestow blessings. Therefore, God called Ezekiel to warn and exhort the people in the hope that they would repent and return (vv. 12-20).

Chuck Smith: And so here we see the heart of God and we understand now a bit of the truth of God and not the perversion that has been fostered by Satan through the ages that God is cruel and harsh and almost relishes judging. Not so. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, any wicked. But God cries unto them to turn.

²⁹ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 33:10–20). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

³⁰ Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

I often hear the complaint: how can a God of love send a man to hell? Well, the complaint itself is wrong. Because the Bible does not teach that God actually sends men to hell. They go there by their own choice, against everything that God has done to keep them from hell. Now, God has given to us free choice. I can choose what I want. God doesn't force me to serve Him. He doesn't force me to love Him. He gives me that choice, and He respects the choice that I make. But God does everything short of violating my choice to bring me into His kingdom. But if I refuse every innovation of God towards me, every invitation of the Spirit, if I do despite to the Spirit of grace, trample under foot the Son of God, account the blood of His covenant wherewith He was sanctified an unholy thing. If I say, "Aw, the blood of Jesus Christ, means nothing to me." If I am stubborn, rebellious, and I hang in there, I can make it into hell, but it's the hardest trip in the world. Not easy to go to hell. You've got to fight against God every step, and finally you have to step over Jesus Christ, who actually sort of lays Himself out in your path to stop you from your madness. But the madness of man.

God says, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why would ye die, O house of Israel?" The path that they have taken is a path of destruction. They are pining away in their transgressions and sins. And God is crying to them to turn.³¹

ESV I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Bible is clear that God will punish sin and vindicate his holiness and justice. At the same time, God feels sorrow over the punishment and death of creatures created in his image.

[As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel] This expression is the same in message as the N.T. statements that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9) and, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

Clarke: As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked—From this to the twentieth verse inclusive is nearly the same with Ezekiel 18, on which I wish the reader to consult the notes.

God, Grace—This passage suggests the priority of God's grace over His wrath. Wrath comes only when the purposes of grace and love are rejected. His first desire is our repentance.

It is quite obvious from this verse that God does not want to judge. Isaiah said that judgment was His *strange* work. God wants to save them, and He is urging them to turn to Him and accept life.

³¹ Chuck Smith, Sermon Notes on Ezekiel, Pastor Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa CA

Ezekiel 33:12

Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his *righteousness* in the day that he sinneth.

Constable 12-13: The right conduct of a usually righteous person would not exempt him from judgment if he sinned. Neither would the sinful conduct of a usually sinful person exempt him from forgiveness if he repented. The usually righteous person should not take God's promise of life for righteous living as a guarantee that he was exempt from punishment if he sinned. As in chapter 18, the issue here is not earning eternal salvation or losing it by the way one lives. It is rather the consequences of individual behavior in this life, which the Mosaic Law promised.³²

Ron Daniel 12-20, Righteousness and wickedness: Having trouble keeping track of what's been said? Well, from verses eight through 20, the word "righteous" shows up 12 times, and "wicked" appears 14 times. Combine that with all the variations of circumstances in these verses, and anyone could understand your confusion. We'll take it piece by piece.

Here are the various circumstances:

- 1) If a righteous man falls into sin, his previous righteousness won't save him.
- 2) If a wicked man turns from wickedness, he won't be brought down by his previous wickedness.
- 3) If God says to a righteous man, "You're going to live," there is a chance that the Man will think he's got a "get out of jail free card." But if he falls into sin, he'll find out he didn't have one.
- 4) If God says to a wicked man, "You're going to die," the man still has an opportunity to repent and live.

Some people disagree with the way God has decided these rules. But, as He addressed back in chapter 18, when there is a disagreement about righteousness between God and man, it is always man who is not right. In a nutshell, God repeats something that He has told us throughout the entire Bible:

Ezek. 33:20 ...*"I will judge each of you according to his ways."*³³

Chuck Smith 12-16: Isn't that glorious? God'll never mention any of your past iniquities again as you turn to Jesus Christ. Of course, this is written in the pre-grace age. This is written under the old law of the covenant. But what is true under this as far as God not remembering our sins again is true under grace, the grace of God whereby we have that forgiveness of sins.³⁴

³² Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

³³ Ron Daniel, Notes on Ezekiel, <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/26-Ezekiel/Ezekiel3301.pdf>

³⁴ Chuck Smith, Sermon Notes on Ezekiel, Pastor Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa CA

Dake: What a rebuke to those who think that a man once born again will be saved regardless of what he does (see Righteousness Defined). It is plainly written here that "the righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression." There can be no misunderstanding of such a simple statement. It is clear that a righteous man cannot continue to be righteous when he sins; and his past experience in God, grace, the new birth, and obedience cannot and will not save his soul if or when he sins. The fact is emphasized by being stated another way: "neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth." Again, the truth is declared that if righteous man trusts in his righteousness to save him, should he go back into sin, the fact is that all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; "but for his iniquity that he committed, he shall die for it" (Ezekiel 33:13). Still again, in Ezekiel 33:18 it is stated that "when the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby." Thus four times here God plainly says that a backslider will not continue to be saved when he goes back into sin again, all statements being uttered by Him to the prophet in answer to the question in Ezekiel 33:10, "If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?"

A 14-fold Answer to This Question:

1. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked—either a wicked man who has not repented or one who has repented, lived for Him for a time, and then gone back into sin (Ezekiel 33:11-19).
2. The wicked must turn from his wickedness to live (Ezekiel 33:11).
3. The wicked man is invited and commanded to turn from his wickedness or he will die in his sins and be lost.
4. The righteousness of the righteous shall not even deliver such a man if he returns to sin (Ezekiel 33:12).
5. In the day that a righteous man goes back into sin he will incur the penalty of the broken law, and be separated from God as all other sinners are (Ezekiel 33:12-13).
6. Past righteousness will not save a righteous man when he transgresses and becomes a sinner again (Ezekiel 33:12-19).
7. The wickedness of the wicked will not damn his soul if and when he repents and turns from his wickedness to serve God and live in righteousness (Ezekiel 33:13-19).
8. God shows no partiality. He will not save the wicked until he repents and turns from sin to live right; and He will not continue to save the righteous man if he turns from his righteousness and lives in sin (Ezekiel 33:12-19).
9. All the righteousness of the righteous will not be remembered to cause God to excuse him in the day that he sins; for his iniquity that he commits he will die (Ezekiel 33:13).
10. When God says to the righteous that he will surely live if he continues in righteousness or die if he goes back into sin, that is what is meant.
11. When God says to the wicked that he will die, and he turns from his sins to do that which is lawful and right, then he will live and that is what is meant (Ezekiel 33:14-15).
12. All the sins of the wicked will not be remembered and mentioned to him to damn his soul when he turns from them to do that which is lawful and right; he will surely live (Ezekiel 33:16).

13. When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will even die thereby (Ezekiel 33:18).
14. When the wicked turns from his wickedness to do that which is lawful and right, he will live thereby (Ezekiel 33:19).³⁵

Nelson: In punishing Israel God was being faithful to the covenant stipulations. This covenant had been approved by the Israelites. They had agreed to its commands and accepted the consequences of breaking them, corporately and individually (see 5:8–17; 12:15, 16; 16:60, 61; 18:19–32; 20:5; Ex. 19:1–9; Deut. 27). God presents His rationale in these verses for deciding who would be rewarded with life and who would suffer death: He would save those who repent and turn to Him, but would condemn those who trust in themselves and do evil. After presenting His rationale, God declares that His judgment is just and fair—certainly more just than the practices of the Israelites.³⁶

Ezekiel 33:13

When I shall say to the righteous, *that* he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.

Missler - Your Righteousness Is Not Enough:

He was saying that all the good deeds you might do will not compensate for your bad deeds. To have adequate righteousness before God, you have to be blameless. He that is guilty of one fault is guilty of all.

That is the same idea here, only it is said in another way. You have to stand in God's righteousness, and that comes about through repentance, and taking refuge in His mercy, not by standing in your own righteousness. Whatever you have done that is noteworthy before the Lord is not enough to offset your iniquities.³⁷

Clarke: If he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity—If he trust in his acting according to the statutes and ordinances of religion, and according to the laws relative to rights and wrongs among men, and in other respects commit iniquity, he shall die for it.

LAN: Past good deeds will not save a person who decides to turn to a life of sin. Some people think they have done enough good deeds to overshadow the sins they don't want to give up. But it's useless to try to be good in some areas so you can be deliberately bad in others. God wants wholehearted love and obedience.

God was not dismissing a man's previous life in the sense of having no interest in it. Rather He emphasizes that in the entire course of life a man is free to change, if he will. A "righteous" man who trusts "in his own righteousness," i.e., his own works, is lulled into satisfied complacency, unaware of his need to repent and turn to the Lord.

³⁵ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

³⁶ The Nelson Study Bible, Notes on Ezekiel

³⁷ Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

Salvation, Belief—See 11:18-21, Hab 2:4, note. Trusting in our own righteousness to save us is like trusting in filthy rags. The prophet here emphasizes God's justice rather than His mercy. V. 14 balances what is said. Salvation changes the heart and leads to obedient trust in God. Compare Eze 18:24.

Ezekiel 33:14

Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right;

Constable 14-16: God's warnings that the wicked would die because of their sinfulness also needed to be understood properly. They would die only if they failed to repent. If the wicked turned from his sins and obeyed the Mosaic Law, he would not die (prematurely). God would not hold his former sins against him. He would receive his life as a reward for his righteous conduct.³⁸

Ezekiel 33:15

If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.

LAN: While good deeds will not save us, our salvation must lead to righteous actions (see Ephes. 2:10; James 2:14-17). This includes restitution for past sins (as exemplified in the story of Zacchaeus, see Luke 19:1-10). God expects us to make restitution, whenever necessary, for the wrongs we have committed.

Ezekiel 33:16

None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live.

Ezekiel 33:17

Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal.

Constable: The Jews were saying that the Lord was not dealing with them justly, but it was really their conduct and their thinking that were not right.

Chuck Smith: "God isn't fair." How many times we've heard this complaint against God. "God isn't fair." This is the underlying complaint, really, whenever a person says, "How can a God of love...?" you know that they are challenging the fairness of God. No matter what they say after that. There is that subtle challenge of the fairness of God. And how

³⁸ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

many times the fairness of God has been challenged by man. And here the children of Israel were challenging, "The way of the Lord isn't equal."³⁹

ESV your people say, "The way of the Lord is not just." When people do wrong, they are quick to complain about God rather than admitting their own sin.

Dake: [not equal] What could be unequal about God being just to both the wicked and the righteous? About the wicked being permitted to live the day he turns from sin to serve God, and the righteous man dying spiritually if he turns from God to serve sin again? If the wicked man is not forced to live and die in sin, it is a matter of choice; and if the righteous is not forced to remain righteous, it is a matter of choice. God has made a way whereby both the wicked and the righteous can be saved, neither being compelled to sin and be lost. Both can be saved if they wish to be, or lost if they choose to be.⁴⁰

The children of Israel had another complaint. They said that God was not fair in His judgment. He judged everybody alike; yet there were some "good people" among the captives.

Ezekiel 33:18

When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby.

McGee: This verse is not speaking about somebody losing salvation. God is saying that when one of His children gets into sin, He will judge him. That is exactly what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:31: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." And God says through John that there is a sin unto death (1 John 5:16). He is speaking about a child of God. What kind of death is he talking about? He is talking about physical death. Some Christians are judged for their sins by physical death. I am amazed that more folks don't catch on to God's discipline after a time. There are others who are in the Lord's work, but what they are doing is not prospering, and they are getting deeper and deeper into debt. You would think that the message would come through loud and clear that perhaps God is moving in judgment, that what they are doing is not pleasing to Him.⁴¹

Ezekiel 33:19

But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.

Clarke: He shall live thereby—"The wages of sin is death;" the "gift of God is eternal life." It is a miserable trade by which a man cannot live; such a trade is sin.

³⁹ Chuck Smith, Sermon Notes on Ezekiel, Pastor Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa CA

⁴⁰ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

⁴¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 33:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ezekiel 33:20

Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways.

Missler: This was just another way of saying that when the wicked repent and then walk in the Lord's ways, he was getting righteousness by God's mercy which was granted as a function of repentance. That is the underlying thought in this passage.

Now turn to Ezekiel 24:25-27. That was where the Lord prophesied that he would be silent to Judah until Jerusalem fell. seven years passed as he waited for the day that occurs in these next verses of Chapter 33.⁴²

Constable: The people persisted in claiming that the Lord's ways of dealing with them were not just. Yet Yahweh assured them that He would deal with each of them fairly, according to their own individual behavior. God does not blame one person for another person's sins.

In our day many people refuse to take personal responsibility for their lives and chose rather to blame someone else for the way they live (e.g. a parent, employer, teacher, abuser, the devil, God). We may not be responsible for the actions of others that have resulted in our present condition, but we are responsible for how we conduct ourselves in our present condition.

This message repeats God's appointment of Ezekiel as a watchman over Israel (ch. 3) and His assurance of personal responsibility (chs. 3 and 18). Evidently the exiles had difficulty accepting this revelation. They tended to view Ezekiel as an entertainer (vv. 30-32) and God as unfair.⁴³

Constable, Restoration to the Promised Land 33:21-39:29:

The concept of the land is particularly significant to the six messages [33:21—39:29] delivered in that one night before the news of Jerusalem's fall reached the exiles in Babylonia [cf. 33:21-22]. Since Jerusalem had fallen, would the land be lost to Israel (33:21-33)? It was the false 'shepherds' of Israel who had lost the land for Israel by leading the people astray from the truth. But the true 'shepherd,' the Messiah, would ultimately restore the land to Israel (ch. 34). Those foreigners who had possessed the land of Israel and had oppressed her people would be judged and removed so that Israel might again possess her own land (35:1—36:15). Then God would restore Israel to her promised land (36:16—37:14) and reunite the nation in fulfillment of God's covenants with her (37:15-28). Never again would a foreign power have dominion over Israel in her land (chs. 38—39).⁴⁴

Dake: [I will judge you every one after his ways] One thing is certain, God is the judge of all and will mete out true justice to every man according to his works and ways. No man can escape His judgment—saint or sinner; and we can be assured that the judgment

⁴² Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

⁴³ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

⁴⁴ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

of God will be right. It will be according to the true nature and disposition of every man as he has chosen to walk in the light as he has received it from God's own revelation.⁴⁵

God, Justice—God's grace is not cause to condemn Him as unjust.

McGee: Godly men, too, were carried away into captivity. Those who had trusted God were carried off just like the most wicked people, and these godly people are complaining. It looks like God is being unfair.

You and I experience this same principle in many ways. For example, we have to pay excessive insurance premiums today because there are a lot of alcoholics. I don't drink, but I have to pay for the ones who do. I have to pay high taxes because we have a lot of folks in Washington today who spend money foolishly. We are identified with our nation.

And the good people in Israel were suffering because they were identified with the nation. But there is more to it than that. Notice what God says—

“O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways.” In other words, I am going to judge every one of you. And, my friend, whoever you are, you will have to stand before God for judgment some day. If you are a child of God, He will judge you for the sins you have committed, but you will not lose your salvation. However, if you are a lost person, you have no claim on God whatsoever, He has made that clear in the New Testament. In 1 Peter 3:12 we read, “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” God doesn't say that He won't hear the prayer of the wicked; He just says that He hears the prayers of the righteous, which implies that He feels no obligation to hear the prayer of the unsaved person. Of course, if he would cry out for salvation, God would hear and answer, but the point is that the unsaved person has no claim on God whatsoever. When you hear an unsaved person ask, “Why does God let this happen to me?” you know that he has no claim whatever on God's mercy. God is *righteous* when He is judging a lost world, and sometimes we forget that this happens to be *His* world.⁴⁶

Ezekiel 33:21

And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying, The city is smitten.

Constable, The date and setting of these messages 21-22:

Ezekiel's last prophecy about the judgment coming on Judah and Jerusalem ended with an announcement that a fugitive would escape Jerusalem's destruction and come and report the city's fall to the exiles (24:25-26). At that time God would open Ezekiel's mouth and he would be dumb no longer (24:27). Now the messenger arrived and God opened the prophet's mouth.

On the fifth day of the tenth month of the twelfth year of the Jews' exile, namely, on January 19, 585 B.C., word reached the exiles from refugees who had come from

⁴⁵ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

⁴⁶ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 33:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jerusalem. They announced that Jerusalem had fallen to Nebuchadnezzar. The siege of Jerusalem began on the tenth month, the tenth day, and the ninth year of King Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 25:1; 588 B.C.). The city fell on the fourth month, the ninth day, and the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 25:2-7; 586 B.C.). Thus the siege lasted 18 months. The news of Jerusalem's fall reached the exiles in Babylon about five months after the city fell in 586 B.C. According to one method of reckoning, it took 18 months for news of Jerusalem's fall to reach the exiles, but it seems more probable that it took about five months, which was apparently the normal time it took to make this trip (cf. Ezra 7:6-9).⁴⁷

Ron Daniel, The City Has Been Taken: For 12 years, this group of Jews from the second Babylonian attack had been in exile. But all that time, the false prophets in Jerusalem and in their own midst had been telling them everything was going to be fine.

But then refugees from the third and final attack had come straggling their way into Babylon. On that day, the Jews learned that Jerusalem was taken, just as Ezekiel had told them would happen. All the words of their false prophets had been proven wrong, and he had been vindicated as a true prophet of God.⁴⁸

And so the news finally arrived. It was a year earlier that Jerusalem fell. But one of the persons who had escaped finally comes to Ezekiel bringing him the news that Jerusalem was smitten.

ESV 21–22: The Fall of Jerusalem. This brief notice has an importance out of proportion to its size. It provides the hinge on which the main structure of the book turns. The readers, and Ezekiel, have had preparation for this precise moment: Ezekiel's muteness was first encountered in 3:22–27, and a marker had been put down when the siege of Jerusalem began (24:1–2, 25–27). The date is now January 585 b.c., about five months after the fall of the city. The arrival of the fugitive confirms the word spoken at the beginning of the siege (24:25–27), affirms Ezekiel's prophetic ministry, and establishes the work of God in bringing it about. It also gives weight to the words that follow.

This was about 18 months after the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:2-3).

One that had escaped out of Jerusalem—After it had been taken by the Chaldeans.

Came unto me, saying, The City Is Smitten—This very message God had promised to the prophet, chap. 24:26.

LAN 21-22: Near the beginning of his ministry, Ezekiel was unable to speak except to give specific messages from God (Ezekiel 3:26-27). After Ezekiel's prophecies came true and the false prophets were exposed, Ezekiel was again able to talk freely. No longer needing to prove himself, he was free to offer God's message of restoration and hope.

⁴⁷ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

⁴⁸ Ron Daniel, Notes on Ezekiel, <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/26-Ezekiel/Ezekiel3301.pdf>

The final, large collection of messages in Ezekiel communicates comfort and consolation to the exiles in Babylon following the shock of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Nelson: In January 585 B.C., Ezekiel received the news that Jerusalem had been taken. The city had been under siege by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians for two and a half years (2 Kin. 25:1–10). These two verses introduce six oracles (33:23–39:29). Ezekiel received a message from **the LORD** and reported it to the exiles in Babylon.

Revelation, Messengers—Those who speak for God reveal God’s purposes at His command and remain silent until God’s chosen time to reveal and explain. God silenced His spokesman until the fall of Jerusalem. Then He opened a new era in the prophet’s career.

A turning point in Ezekiel’s ministry. The fall of Jerusalem, for which Ezekiel had waited seven years, has happened. Now his ministry would be one of promise for the nation. *twelfth year*. Some Hebrew mss. read “eleventh year,” the year Jerusalem fell (cf. Jer. 39:2), which would mean that Ezekiel received the news six months after the fall. Some believe two systems of dating are involved (Palestinian and Babylonian), though it is not impossible that half a year passed before Ezekiel received full details.

McGee: Ezekiel had already said that Jerusalem was destroyed because God had told him, but as yet he had been given no information about it. When the news of the destruction of the city was brought to these people, it absolutely dumbfounded them. They were overwhelmed by the news. They never believed that anything like this could possibly take place. On the very day that this news was brought, Ezekiel’s wife died, and God said to him in effect, “Don’t grieve for your wife. I want these people to know that I have repudiated their city. They think that I have to have Jerusalem. They think that I won’t destroy it. They don’t believe I will judge sin, but I will. Therefore, don’t weep for your wife. Let the people know that at this time the city is being destroyed because of its sin. The city is smitten.”⁴⁹

OTS 21-22: Manner of the Watchman (33:21–22).

In the twelfth year of Jehoiachin’s exile, the tenth month, the fifth day, a fugitive arrived from Jerusalem with the sad news (33:21). In modern reckoning the date would be January 4, 585 B.C.. This would be some eighteen months after the actual fall of the city (cf. Jer 39:2). Commentators have difficulty explaining why it would have taken eighteen months for the news to reach Babylon. A general report of the destruction of Jerusalem may have reached Babylon somewhat earlier, but this would be an eyewitness report from one who actually had been through the ordeal. This fugitive may have been detained for some time by the Babylonians.

The previous dated oracle was delivered in the ninth year of the exile, the tenth month and the tenth day, i.e., January 15, 587 B.C. (24:1). That was the day when Jerusalem came under siege by Nebuchadnezzar. In that oracle Ezekiel explained his silent sorrow

⁴⁹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 33:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

over the death of his wife. From that date until the fugitive arrived with details of the fall of the city, the prophet's mouth had been closed from speaking to the Israelites. During those three years of silence Ezekiel composed most of his oracles against foreign nations (chaps. 25–32). The evening before the messenger arrived the silence imposed on the prophet at the outset of Jerusalem's siege was removed (33:22). This fulfilled the prediction made to the prophet in 24:26ff. News of Jerusalem's destruction vindicated the first half of Ezekiel's ministry. He was now authorized to open his mouth in a new series of utterances. He could now move freely among the captives offering consolation in the midst of their depression.⁵⁰

Ezekiel 33:22

Now the hand of the LORD was upon me in the evening, afore he that was escaped came; and had opened my mouth, until he came to me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb.

Missler: The gist of that verse is that he could not officially prophesy to his people until a messenger comes. It took somewhere between six months and maybe as long as a year and a half for that messenger to get to Ezekiel. That sounds bizarre at first, but you have to recognize that the city was taken and only a few escaped. For an escapee to find his way to Ezekiel who is in captivity at the headquarters of the empire that laid siege, first of all that took a lot of guts; and it apparently took quite a bit of time.

The night before the messenger came, Ezekiel knew of the Lord that the city had been smitten, and the restriction he had been under that he could not prophesy until that happened, and one came to tell him, would be ended. Now that he was able to again prophesy to his people, he would focus on the remnant that were still in Judah.⁵¹

Constable: The Lord had spoken to Ezekiel the evening before the refugees arrived and gave him permission to speak to the people when they heard the announcement of Jerusalem's fall. This broke the silence that God had imposed on him (cf. 3:26-27; 24:27).

He was now able to converse with people and have a 'pastoral' ministry among them apart from his prophetic preaching. For about seven and a half years, Ezekiel had been under this constraint, but now he was free to speak.⁵²

Ron Daniel, No Longer Speechless: This is the fifth time that Ezekiel has made mention of the hand of the Lord being upon him (1:3; 3:14; 3:22; 8:1; 33:22). We discussed the meaning of this in our very first study. God had been imparting blessing, authority, and empowerment on Ezekiel the evening before the refugees arrived from their long trip from Jerusalem. He was prepared to speak His Word and do His work when they arrived the next morning.

When the morning came, and the refugees arrived, Ezekiel's mouth was opened. Remember, he had been rendered speechless by the Lord back in chapter three:

⁵⁰ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 33:21–22). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

⁵¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

⁵² Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

Ezek. 3:26-27 “...I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be mute and cannot be a man who rebukes them, for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth...”

For all this time, Ezekiel was only able to speak on certain occasions. Now, his tongue is loosed, and he is able to communicate freely again.⁵³

Now the Lord, you remember, told Ezekiel that he was going to be dumb until they got word of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. So the Lord opened his mouth and he was no more dumb.

[hand of the LORD was upon me] This expression is found seven times and means that the prophet received strength and power from God (Ezekiel 1:3; Ezekiel 3:14,22; Ezekiel 8:1; Ezekiel 33:22; Ezekiel 37:1; Ezekiel 40:1).

Dake: [opened my mouth, until he came to me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb] Evidently, the prophet had been mute, speaking only when God opened his mouth to make predictions, as he was instructed in Ezekiel 3:26-27; Ezekiel 24:27.⁵⁴

The prophet had been in an ecstasy **in the evening**, and the Lord opened his mouth by the time the man arrived the next morning (cf. 3:26, 27; 24:27). One tradition identifies the messenger with Baruch (Jer 45:5; Baruch 1:2). Ezekiel was now free to devote himself to pastoral work, earlier hinted at. Cf. 16:60ff.; 17:22ff.; 20:33ff.⁵⁵

Clarke: My mouth was opened—They had now the fullest evidence that I had spoken from the Lord. I therefore spoke freely and fully what Good delivered to me, chap. 24:27.

McGee: You see, at the end of chapter 24 God announced to Ezekiel the destruction of Jerusalem, the bloody city. From that point on (chs. 25–33) He had given him no prophecy for Jerusalem; instead He had given him messages for the surrounding nations. Now when we come here to chapter 33, we find that God no longer makes Ezekiel dumb about Jerusalem. He says to him, “I have some messages for you about Jerusalem now.”⁵⁶

Ezekiel 33:23

Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

Constable, The first message of hope 23-33:

This first message dealt with a serious defect in the Israelites. The Jews still in Judea were not listening to the whole counsel of God but were picking and choosing what they

⁵³ Ron Daniel, Notes on Ezekiel, <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/26-Ezekiel/Ezekiel3301.pdf>

⁵⁴ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

⁵⁵ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 33:22). Chicago: Moody Press.

⁵⁶ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 33:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

would obey (vv. 23-29). The Jews in exile were listening to Ezekiel, but they were not responding (vv. 30-33). If they were to profit from the messages of hope that Ezekiel proceeded to give them, all the Jews needed to respond to those he had already delivered by repenting. Thus this first message in this series prepared them for those that followed. The first step on the road to hope was a change in their attitude toward God's word.⁵⁷

Constable 23-24, The attitude of the Jews in Judea 23-29:

The Lord informed the prophet about the attitude of the Jews still in the land. The few Jews who still lived in the waste places of the Promised Land were claiming that since God had promised that land to Abraham they were right in staying in it (cf. 11:15; Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8; John 8:33, 39). But Jeremiah had told the Jews in the land to submit to the Babylonians (Jer. 40—44).

The lack of spiritual sensitivity and the smug self-interest evident in the quotation contrast with Abraham's total dependence on God.⁵⁸

Ron Daniel, Should You Possess the Land?: The Jews had been mostly killed or removed from the Promised Land. However, there was a handful of them left, scattered around various parts of Israel, in the areas that had been trashed, ruined, and destroyed by the Babylonians.

Some of them began to think, "Our ancestor Abraham possessed this land, even though he was only one man. We've got more than that already, so we're going to maintain possession of it." But God was quick to point out that they were living in sin, so why did they think He would allow them to have it? No, He would insure that they would be removed - one way or another.

It is discouraging to me when I hear people "claim" the promises of God while while at the same time neglect the commandments of God. You don't get to pick and choose. These guys were holding to the Abrahamic covenant, while neglecting the Mosaic covenant. In other words, God had made an unconditional promise to Abraham, that his descendants would inherit this land. However, God had also commanded the Jews that if they did not follow His Law, they would be removed from the land. Essentially, they were remembering Abraham, but forgetting Moses. God is not going to let them.⁵⁹

Chuck Smith 23-24: So the Lord is saying to Ezekiel, "Though Nebuchadnezzar has conquered Jerusalem and has set up Gedaliah as a governor, yet the hearts of the people are still rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar." They are saying, "Look, Abraham was only one man and God gave him the land, and we are many so we can take the land still." And so even at the time of Gedaliah they were not really totally subdued. The people were still rebellious in their hearts. And so God is speaking to Ezekiel concerning the attitude that the people had who were back there in the land. Of course, Jeremiah was with them. Jeremiah kept telling them to just surrender to Babylon, things would go well, and if they dared to resist then they would be destroyed out of the land. They did not listen to Jeremiah either.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes.htm>

⁵⁸ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes.htm>

⁵⁹ Ron Daniel, Notes on Ezekiel, <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/26-Ezekiel/Ezekiel3301.pdf>

⁶⁰ Chuck Smith, Sermon Notes on Ezekiel, Pastor Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa CA

ESV 23–33: Culpability. Although the movement toward restoration has begun, words from the Lord are castigating Judeans at home (vv. 23–29) and abroad (vv. 30–33) regarding ungodly living.

ESV 23–29: A Word for the Homelanders. Those left in Judah after its fall are addressed. The scenarios described (vv. 24–26) overlap with those listed in ch. 18. The connection is appropriate. Chapter 18 challenges the notion that ancestry ensures (or prohibits) blessing, and the claim confronted here, in part, is that “paternity” implies possession. Rather, the desolation of the land (33:27–29) is directly linked to the people's own abominations.

Ezekiel’s introductory formula—identical or similar to this verse—marks the beginning of the messages received from the LORD in this section of the book (33:21–39:29).

History, Judgment—See on Isa 1:24-26. History does not guarantee God’s blessings. A people who do not live according to God’s will so clearly revealed in history cannot expect to receive the blessings enjoyed by the patriarchs. Judgment is the only expectation for disobedient people. Judgment justifies the thankless work of God’s messenger.

McGee 23-24: The people of Israel are remembering how God took care of Abraham; yet there was only one of him, and there are a whole lot of them. They expect Him to take care of them in the same way. They are ignoring the fact that there was a great deal of difference between Abraham and themselves. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. These people do not believe God.⁶¹

OTS 23-28: Ministry of the Watchman (33:23–28).

During his first commission the Lord described to Ezekiel in detail the nature of the audience to whom he would be ministering (cf. 2:3–7). The watchman’s work of restoration would be no easier than his earlier work of condemnation. The Lord now revealed to Ezekiel the character of those who had survived the destruction of Jerusalem, and those who had been carried away to Babylon. The one “possessed hope without holiness,” the others were “hearers of the word, but not doers of the work.”

1. *The survivors in Palestine (33:23–29).* Those who had survived the destruction of Jerusalem had unrealistic optimism regarding their future. Originally, they argued, God had given the land of Palestine to a single individual, viz., Abraham. How much more claim did these survivors have upon the land since they were many! (33:24). The survivors did not take into account the fact that God’s promises always have the implied condition that men faithfully serve the Lord.

The survivors were not entitled to that land for they continued committing transgression against the Lord. They ate meat from which blood had not been properly drained. They lifted up their eyes to idols. They shed blood, probably in child sacrifice.

⁶¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 33:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

They lived by violence. They committed various other abominations including the defilement of the wife of their neighbor (33:25f.).

Nothing but further disaster awaited the survivors of Jerusalem's fall. God swore an oath that they would yet face the sword of divine justice, or they would be devoured by wild beasts, or they would die by pestilence. The land of Judah would become desolate. The pride of Judah's power, i.e., her favored position as a nation, would cease. No one would even make a trip through Judah. This would bring the survivors to see the true nature of God. Then they would realize that they had been justly punished for their abominations (33:27–29).

2. *The captives in Babylon* (33:30–33). Now that Jerusalem had fallen, Ezekiel was very popular among the exiles. They talked about him throughout the community. They were anxious to hear new revelations from God. They sat before Ezekiel as God's people seeking instruction. They regarded the prophet as an accomplished entertainer. Yet there were no signs of repentance. They implemented none of the measures demanded by the prophet. The heart of the exiles was bent toward covetousness. God warned Ezekiel not to be deceived by their words of love. Only when all of Ezekiel's prophecies came to pass would the attitude of the captives change. Then they would know that a true prophet had been in their midst.⁶²

Ezekiel 33:24

Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but we *are* many; the land is given us for inheritance.

ESV: The patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) are rarely mentioned by the prophets. For this invocation of Abraham, cf. Isa. 41:8; 51:2. The Judeans' "logic" of arguing from the one to the many here is deeply flawed. On possession of land at this time, see also Jer. 39:10.

Clarke: Abraham was one—If he was called to inherit the land when he was alone, and had the whole to himself, why may we not expect to be established here, who are his posterity, and are many? They wished to remain in the land and be happy after the Chaldeans had carried the rest away captives.

Nelson: they who inhabit those ruins: This refers to the people who had remained in Jerusalem. They thought they were the remnant—the faithful ones. But they experienced the final siege of the city by King Nebuchadnezzar, for reasons God will give in the following verses.

They that inhabit those wastes (lit., *ruins*; cf. II Kgs 25:12, 22), who survived the destruction of Jerusalem, *keep saying:* If **Abraham ... one ... inherited the land** (Isa 51:1, 2), surely they, his numerous descendants, had a stronger right to it (cf. Mt 3:9). 25, 26. **Say unto them.** The survivors of Jerusalem, so confident of their safety before the

⁶² Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 33:23–28). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

fall of the city (11:3-12), are charged with six specific sins (cf. 18:6, 10-12, 15; 22:6, 9), which disqualified them for any inheritance.⁶³

Ezekiel 33:25

Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?

Eating blood was a violation of the Levitical laws. Lifting their eyes to the idols was another violation. And they slaughtered people.

Constable 25-26: Ezekiel was to address the refugees who had brought the message of Jerusalem's fall and the other Israelites in the name of their sovereign Lord. Since the Jews did not keep the Mosaic Law (cf. Exod. 20:4-5, 13-14; Lev. 17:10-14; 19:26), did they have a right to possess the land? God had promised the land to Abraham's descendants, but He had also told them that they could only occupy their land if they obeyed the Law that He had given them (cf. Deut. 27—28; 29:25-29).⁶⁴

Chuck Smith: Now these are the indictments against these people saying, "Oh, the land is ours, you know. Abraham was only one and God gave him the land; we are many so the land is ours." And God says, "Look, just tell them that they eat with the blood." That is, they were not killing the food as God required in the law, thoroughly bleeding the animals, but they were strangling the animals or killing them in ways by which the blood remained in the animal and they were eating with the blood. They were lifting up their eyes towards idols. They were shedding blood. And God says,

You know, here you're committing all of these evil things against My law and you think I'm gonna let you possess the land?⁶⁵

ESV 25–26: On this catalog of crimes, cf. notes on 18:5–18. You eat flesh with the blood. The Hebrew is literally “you eat over the blood,” an idiom used also in Lev. 19:26. The reference is to illicit sacrifice. Ezekiel's rhetorical questions (shall you then possess the land?) imply the terms of the covenant that the homelander have seemingly forgotten.

Clarke: Ye eat with the blood—Abraham was righteous, ye are unrighteous. Eating of blood, in any way dressed, or of flesh from which the blood had not been extracted, was and is in the sight of God abominable. All such practices he has absolutely and for ever forbidden. Let the vile blood-eaters hear and tremble. See the note on Acts 15:20, and the passages in the margin.

⁶³ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 33:24). Chicago: Moody Press.

⁶⁴ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

⁶⁵ Chuck Smith, Sermon Notes on Ezekiel, Pastor Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa CA

Nelson: Ezekiel confronted his people with specific examples of their past and present refusal to obey God's revealed will for their lives (see 18:6, 10; 22:11; Ex. 20:4, 5, 13–14; Lev. 7:26, 27; 17:10–14; 19:26; Deut. 12:16, 23). Was it not then reasonable that God would punish the present generation by removing them from the land, at least temporarily? The writer of Hebrews, after using the example of Israel's failure to enter the land (ch. 3), admonished the church in a similar way (see Heb. 4:1).

Ezekiel 33:26

Ye stand upon your sword, ye work abomination, and ye defile every one his neighbour's wife: and shall ye possess the land?

Clarke: **Ye stand upon your sword**—Ye live by plunder, rapine, and murder. Ye are every way impure; and shall ye possess the land? No.

God says to them, "I won't let you have the land. I put the heathen and the pagan out of this land because of their sin, and you are doing the same things they did."

Ezekiel 33:27

Say thou thus unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; As I live, surely they that *are* in the wastes shall fall by the sword, and him that *is* in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they that *be* in the forts and in the caves shall die of the pestilence.

The Lord assured the people that the Jews who remained in the land would die there by various means including the sword, beasts, and disease (cf. Lev. 26:22, 25).

Clarke: **They that are in the wastes**—He seems to speak of those Jews who had fled to rocks, caves, and fortresses, in the mountains; whose death he predicts, partly by the sword, partly by wild beasts, and partly by famine.

Ezekiel 33:28

For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, that none shall pass through.

Constable 28-29: God promised to desolate the land completely and to humble the pride of His people (cf. Lev. 26:19, 33). Even the mountains would be desolate, and travelers would not even pass through the land. Then they would know that He is God, when He desolated their land.

McGee: I cannot get as elated about the land of Israel as some of my very good minister friends do. When they get into that land, they go into ecstasy. The way some of them act you would think they were on drugs! They exclaim, "Isn't it wonderful to see this land!" I want to tell you that the land is just about as desolate as any place you could possibly

find today. That land is desolate because the judgment of God is upon it. There is a water shortage—put a little water on that land and it blossoms like a rose—but they can't get enough water. That is the great problem. God's judgment is not only upon a people; it is also upon a land.⁶⁶

Ezekiel 33:29

Then shall they know that I *am* the LORD, when I have laid the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed.

Ezekiel 33:30

Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD.

Constable 30-31: The attitude of the Jews in Babylon:

God also told Ezekiel that the exiles were speaking to one another about him privately and publicly. They were saying, Let's go and hear what Yahweh has to say to us through Ezekiel. So they came and sat before the prophet and listened to what he said, but their heart remained bent on pursuing their lustful desires and personal gain.⁶⁷

Ron Daniel 30-33, They Will Know: Now, God focuses on Ezekiel himself. He asks Ezekiel, "Did you know that everyone is talking about you now? They finally believe that you're My prophet. They're all fired up to hear what you have to say."

Unfortunately, while the people wanted to hear the words of God, they had no intention of acting on them. While their minds regarding Ezekiel had changed, their hearts for sin had not.

And so the Lord tells Ezekiel that he's going to have an audience, but they're going to be coming for the wrong reason. It's just like people nowadays who come to church because the music is rockin', the coffee is good, the pastor is funny, or the single girls are pretty. God isn't fooled. He sees the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, and knows why we're here.⁶⁸

Now, Ezekiel, they're still talking about you and in their houses they'll say, "Hey let's go down and see what the word of the Lord is from the prophet. Let's go down and see Ezekiel, see what God has to say."

ESV 30–33: A Word for the Exiles. If the “implied” audience for vv. 23–29 was the homelander, the “real” audience listening in was Ezekiel's fellow exiles. Their enjoyment of the rebuke aimed at their land-hungry compatriots is cut short as Ezekiel

⁶⁶ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 33:28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶⁷ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

⁶⁸ Ron Daniel, Notes on Ezekiel, <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/26-Ezekiel/Ezekiel3301.pdf>

turns to accuse *them* of also being marked by greed (v. 31). Compounding this, they treat prophetic words as mere entertainment (v. 32). No judgment is pronounced, but it is ominously implied (v. 33).

Clarke: **The people still are talking against thee** *bach* should be rather translated, “concerning thee,” than “against thee;” for the following verses show that the prophet was much respected. The Vulgate and Septuagint translate as “concerning thee,”

Clarke: Talking by the walls and in the doors of the houses is not a custom peculiar to the Copts, mentioned by Bp. Pococke, it is a practice among idle people, and among those who are resting from their work, in every country, when the weather permits. Gossiping in the inside of the house is not less frequent, and much more blamable.

Nelson: This section contrasts the actions and attitudes of the exiles with the life of God’s prophet Ezekiel. The exiles had claimed to go to the prophet to receive God’s revelation, but their behavior was inconsistent with their stated beliefs. Their true desire was for entertainment, not for divine enlightenment. If the fall of Jerusalem failed to awaken them spiritually, nothing would. Yet it certainly would open their eyes to the divine truth of Ezekiel’s preaching. In these verses then, God also comforted and consoled Ezekiel. The musical terms may relate to the lyrical nature, and Ezekiel’s singing or chanting, of some of these oracles (see 19:1; 21:9–12).

Many of the exiles looked on Ezekiel as merely providing entertainment for them, and they did not heed his message. They also wanted to profit from the situation.

The people are shaken, and they want to listen to Ezekiel now, but they won’t follow through.

Ezekiel 33:31

And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.

hear ... do not do: See James 1:21–25 for another condemnation of those who hear God’s word but do not put it into practice.

Chuck Smith: Now the people are all talking about you, Ezekiel, saying, "Hey, let's go down to the prophet and hear the word of the Lord." And they come and they sit there before you, just like they were My people. And they hear the words that you're saying, but they're not going to do them.

Now in James we read that a man who is a hearer of the word and not a doer is a man who is deceiving himself. A lot of deception going on, because so often a person thinks, "Well, I study the Word of God," or, "I listen to the Word of God," or, "I hear the Word

of God," or, "I know the Word of God." That's not what cuts it. Are you doing? "Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

So God's indictment against these people because they're coming and they were listening to the prophet, but they were so filled with their own covetousness they weren't doers of the Word.⁶⁹

As the people cometh—As they are accustomed to come on public days, Sabbaths, etc.

Ezekiel's status in the community was suddenly changed, but the exiles are still slow to change. They listened to him and his message of restoration, but would not hear with a determination to do what God told them to do.

Clarke: With their mouth they show much love—They respected the prophet, but would not bend themselves to follow his precepts. They loved earthly things, and did not relish those of heaven.

LAN 30-32: The people refused to act upon Ezekiel's message. When people mock your witness for Christ or fail to act upon your advice, don't give up. You are not witnessing for them alone, but out of faithfulness to God. You cannot make them accept your message; you can only be faithful in delivering it.

LAN: In your heart, do you really love God? These people gave the appearance of following God, but they loved their money more. Many today also give the outward impression of being religious while remaining inwardly greedy. Jesus warned that we cannot love God and Money at the same time (Matthew 6:24). It's easy to say "I surrender all" when we don't have much. It's when we start gaining some money that it becomes difficult to avoid loving it.

Christian Ethics, Property Rights—True religion is more than mere ritual. Attitudes changed and actions which match are the signs of God working in one's inner being.

McGee: On the surface they appeared to be turning to the Lord. They wanted to hear what the Lord had to say but had no intention of obeying Him. They were like folk who go to church in our day to hear an interesting and well-delivered sermon, but what they hear does not change their lives. The epistle of James gets down where the rubber meets the road when he says, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22). This is what God says to Ezekiel about these folk in captivity, "They hear thy words, but they do them not."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Chuck Smith, Sermon Notes on Ezekiel, Pastor Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa CA

⁷⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 33:31). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ezekiel 33:32

And, lo, thou *art* unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.

Constable 32-33: They listened to Ezekiel as they listened to entertainers, singers or instrumentalists. Entertainers expect no response to their performances beyond applause, but preachers expect people to change. The exiles admired Ezekiel for his content and delivery, but they did not put into practice what he told them to do (cf. James 1:22-25). They did not apply it to their own lives and change. Consequently, when what Ezekiel promised came, namely, judgment for personal responsibility (vv. 12-20), they would know that a prophet, a spokesman for God, had been in their midst, not just an entertainer.

This is one of the most pointed indictments of God's people in the Bible. When we are fairly comfortable it is easy to listen to preaching and to critique the preacher but do nothing in response to what he has said. It is essential that we ask ourselves, What does God want me to *do* in view of what I have just heard? And then do it!⁷¹

They just enjoy hearing you talk. They were going for entertainment.

Clarke: As a very lovely song—They admired the fine voice and correct delivery of the prophet; this was their religion, and this is the whole of the religion of thousands to the present day; for never were itching ears so multiplied as now.

LAN: The people were coming to listen to Ezekiel in order to be entertained. They weren't interested in hearing a message from the Lord and then putting it into practice. Many people see church as entertainment. They enjoy the music, the people, and the activities, but they don't take the messages to heart. They don't seek to be challenged or to serve. Have you reduced church services to the level of entertainment, or does your worship truly have an impact on your life? Listen to God's words and then obey—apply his words and put them into practice in your life.

McGee 32-33: Now that Jerusalem has fallen, as Ezekiel had prophesied, the people know he is a true prophet of God. Although they know he is giving them God's Word, they still will not obey it. My friend, unbelief is *willful*; it is not because mankind has a great mentality that cannot accept what God says. The real problem is that people do not want to give up their sin. That was the problem with the people to whom Ezekiel ministered. They were willing to come and listen to what Ezekiel had to say, but it had no effect upon them whatsoever. You would think that the people would now turn to God, but that was not the case. God said to Ezekiel, "Don't let the crowds deceive you. It is true that they are coming and listening, but they are not heeding what you say. They are not doers of the Word at all. They like it when they hear you talk about love, and the future, and prophecy, but it has not affected their lives one whit. They are still living the same way—far from Me."

⁷¹ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

Ezekiel was the *only* man who said that Jerusalem would be destroyed. All of the false prophets said that it would not be destroyed. The word of confirmation has come. Jerusalem is destroyed. Ezekiel is declared a true prophet.⁷²

Ezekiel 33:33

And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.

Missler: Verses 30 - 33 focuses on the exiles who are with Ezekiel in Babylon. It indicates that they showed a lot of interest, they talked about the prophecies, but they did not do what he was trying to get across to them. They were hearers of the Word only, and not doers.

It is one thing to come out and find out what the Lord is saying. Especially when we get into a few upcoming chapters and will be talking about modern weapons technology as Ezekiel apparently saw it. We will be talking about the very peculiar geopolitical situation that God is going to orchestrate that is in place today. We might get very caught up in the timeliness of this Prophet who wrote 2500 years ago, about the circumstances that exist in the Middle East today. We could be very much like those people back there who had interest, but no sincere desire to obey. They listened; but they did not commit. How easy it is for us to be in the same boat, and come short of a sincere commitment to God's leadership.⁷³

God promised that when all that Ezekiel has prophesied has come to pass, the prophet would be vindicated

Chuck Smith: When all these things that you told them happens, then they'll know. Right now they're just listening and you're an entertainment to them. It's interesting how that so many people do go to the house of the Lord for entertainment. You know, it's their place of entertainment. It's a good socially accepted place of good entertainment. And so many churches are catering to these people who are looking for entertainment.

I heard this story of a Baptist pastor who came to his (and it could be any church) came to his assistants and said, "Fellows, the board is going to meet tonight and determine our salaries for the next year. And we're having a difficult time making our budget as it is. So it looks like it's going to be really slim as far as any pay raises this next year. And I think it's very important that we, all of us, just spend the day together praying because if we don't get pay raises, it's going to be a hard tough year. And they're going to be really taking a look at the budget tonight and things really look very bad for any pay hikes. So, let's just gather together and let's just pray that God will somehow work a miracle so that we can all get a raise in pay this next year." And so they decided in order that their prayers really be very spiritual they would pray in Gregorian chants. And so the assistant pastor began, "Oh Lord, you know that it's hard to live on \$15,000 a year. I pray Thee

⁷² McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 33:33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷³ Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

Lord, that You'll help the board to be gracious and maybe give me a raise." And the pastor then offered his prayer and he said, "Yes, Lord, things are tough, and \$22,000 a year is hard to live on when I have all of these expenses that I'm not reimbursed for. And so, Lord, please work and grant me a raise in pay." And then the music director, the one in charge of the entertaining programs for the church said, "Lord, You know that \$50,000 a year is a little hard to get by on, but there's no business like show business, like show business, you know."

But it's sort of a sad indictment against those churches that have found it necessary to put on an entertaining program for people in order to draw the crowds. People with itching ears who will not endure sound doctrine. And yet, such is the case in so many places, where people go for entertainment.

And so they were coming to the prophet for entertainment. He had a good voice; could play instrument well. "And they sit before you and they do hear your words, but they're not going to do them. You're unto them like a lovely song, but when this comes, and it will come, they will know that there was a prophet among them."⁷⁴

Clarke: When this cometh to pass—then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them—What I have predicted, (and it is even now at the doors), then they will be convinced that there was a prophet among them, by whose ministry they did not profit as they ought.

⁷⁴ Chuck Smith, Sermon Notes on Ezekiel, Pastor Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa CA