

Ezekiel's Commission

Ezekiel 3

Ezekiel 3: *"Moreover He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel."*

² So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. ³ And He said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you." So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness.

⁴ Then He said to me: "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. ⁵ For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, ⁶ not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. ⁷ But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted. ⁸ Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. ⁹ Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house." ¹⁰ Moreover He said to me: "Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. ¹¹ And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse."

¹² Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a great thunderous voice: "Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place!" ¹³ I also heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, and a great thunderous noise. ¹⁴ So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. ¹⁵ Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

¹⁶ Now it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ¹⁷ "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: ¹⁸ When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. ¹⁹ Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

²⁰ "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. ²¹ Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul."

22 Then the hand of the Lord was upon me there, and He said to me, "Arise, go out into the plain, and there I shall talk with you." 23 So I arose and went out into the plain, and behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, like the glory which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. 24 Then the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet, and spoke with me and said to me: "Go, shut yourself inside your house. 25 And you, O son of man, surely they will put ropes on you and bind you with them, so that you cannot go out among them. 26 I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and not be one to rebuke them, for they are a rebellious house. 27 But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house."

Background Notes

Ezekiel was given a scroll to eat in chapter 2, and in chapter 3 he ate it. He didn't actually get out his ketchup and fork and literally eat a scroll. No - "eating" the scroll was part of the vision that God gave Ezekiel. As we discussed in chapter 2, this symbolic act meant that Ezekiel was to internalize the Word of God. God's Word had to be worked into Ezekiel's soul so that his speech and conduct would be completely in line with God's mind.

The scroll was as sweet as honey in Ezekiel's mouth (v3). A study of biblical prophecy is sweet in the mouth because it is part of the Word of God – but it is bitter when digested because of the prophecies of the awesome judgments to come.

Ezekiel had to pronounce a warning that the judgment of God was coming. He was appointed to be a watchman over the house of Israel. However, said the Lord, most of the people won't listen to you - in fact, they will be defiant. But Ezekiel was to be as determined as the people were defiant (v8-9).

Once again, in the vision Ezekiel caught a glimpse of the glory of the Lord as he heard the noise of the throne chariot of God (v12-13).

Verse 14: *"So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me."* Why was Ezekiel angry as the Spirit lifted him up in the vision? Ezekiel was angry at the people's sin, but unlike Jonah, he wasn't reluctant to do the work that God called him to do. He was angry about the sinful condition of God's people. Sin among God's people should upset us as well.

The "Tel Abib" (v15) is obviously not the "Tel Aviv" in the modern state of Israel! Same name, but difference place. The Tel Abib of Ezekiel 3 was in Babylon, where the Jewish captives lived beside the River Chebar.

Doctrinal Points

1. A watchman must warn the people.

Verse 17: *“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me.”* In those days, a watchman was positioned on the city walls or towers. He was to look out and see if there was any threat of danger to the city, like an approaching enemy, and he was responsible to warn the people of any possible danger. The watchman met with serious consequences if neglected his duty, or became distracted, or fell asleep on the job, or in any way failed to warn the people. In the same way, Ezekiel had the serious responsibility of warning the people of Israel of God’s coming judgment because of their sins.

Ezekiel’s responsibility as a watchman was to warn both the wicked people and the righteous people (v18-21). If Ezekiel did not warn the wicked people, they would die - and God would hold Ezekiel accountable. If Ezekiel did warn the wicked and they refused to turn from their wicked ways, they would die - but Ezekiel would not be held accountable. If righteous people turned away from their righteous ways and Ezekiel did not warn them, they would die - and Ezekiel would be held accountable. However, if the righteous did not sin because of Ezekiel’s warning, they would live - and Ezekiel would have fulfilled his responsibility.

This passage, by the way, was not teaching that it is possible for believers to lose their salvation by sinning. No! Look at the context! It was not addressed to Christians. The context was a warning of the coming judgment of God on Israel at the hands of the invading Babylonians. Ezekiel’s warning here had to do with **physical** life or death, not **eternal** life or death.

The lives of those who responded to Ezekiel’s warning were spared when they were taken into captivity. Those who did not respond to Ezekiel’s warning met their death at the hands of the Babylonian forces. Ezekiel’s warnings would have been communicated back to Jerusalem, where the Temple was still standing. The prophet Jeremiah was warning the people of Jerusalem as well.

All of this has an application for us today, doesn’t it? A watchman must warn the people. We have a responsibility to preach the gospel and warn people of the coming judgment of God if they do not respond to Him. We are not responsible to force the gospel down people’s throats and make them believe. No! Our responsibility is to present the truth - and leave the results in God’s hands. God holds believers responsible for warning unbelievers around them. Are we doing our job? A watchman must warn the people.

2. A watchman must wait for directions.

Ezekiel waited seven days among the people (v15). His call and commission to be a watchman and to warn a rebellious people of coming danger overwhelmed him. So he waited for directions from the Lord. After seven days, the word of the Lord came with directions for Ezekiel. He was told to go out to a plain outside the city, and there the Lord would give him further directions. Out on the plain, Ezekiel had another glimpse of the glory of God. In addition, he was empowered by the Spirit of God for his ministry and he was given specific directions concerning his ministry (v23-27).

As watchmen, we too must wait on God for directions. Like Ezekiel, we must commune with the Lord “on the plain” - away from the busy schedules and distractions of life. In our quiet times with the Lord we will be more aware of God’s glory. We will be more in tune with the Spirit and more open to His directions. A watchman must wait for directions.

The specific directions Ezekiel received at this time were directions of *restriction*. Ezekiel was not to freely circulate among the people and preach at any time he wanted. He was to go out and proclaim the word of the Lord only where and when the Lord said so. Then those people who would hear would hear, and those who would refuse would refuse (v27).

Sometimes God gives restrictive directions to His watchman today, such as closing the doors to well-intentioned ministries. If the Lord closes ministry doors in your life, remember that at one time the Holy Spirit closed the door for the apostle Paul, when Paul planned to preach the Word in Asia (Acts 15:6). A watchman must wait for directions.

Practical Application

Remember - the cultural barriers are the easy hurdles.

In verses 5-6, God told Ezekiel that He was not sending him to a people of a different language and culture. Ezekiel knew the language and culture of the people to whom he was sent. That part would be easy! The big hurdle was ***the heart of the people***. The people were stubborn and obstinate and rebellious (v7).

The same is true today. Sometimes we think the hardest part of evangelism is going to another country and having to learn a different language and culture so that we can communicate - but that’s the easy part. The rebellious heart of people is still the biggest hurdle!

“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). The cultural barriers are the easy hurdles, but the rebellious heart of man is the most difficult hurdle in evangelism.