



EXPLORE THE BIBLE.®

Commentary

Winter 2021-22



unto the wicked
ad thou givest
akest to warn th
ad way, to save his
man shall die in hi
ood will I require at th
yet if thou warn the wicked
from his wickedness, not
ad way, he shall die in his iniquity;
hast delivered thy soul.

WARN THE RIGHTEOUS
20 Again, When a righteous man
turn from his righteousness
iniquity, and I lay a stumbling
block before him, he shall die; because
I have given him warning, he shall
die, and his righteousness which
he has done shall not be remembered;
but I will require it at his hand.
21 Nevertheless if thou warn the
wicked man, that he doth not sin,
he shall live, because he is warned; also
because he doth not sin, he shall
live, and he shall deliver thy soul.

22 And the hand of the LORD was
upon me; and he said unto me,
Arise, go forth into the plain, and
I will speak with thee.
23 Then I arose, and went
into the plain; and behold, the
glory of the LORD stood there, as
the glory of the LORD which I
saw by the river of Chebar; and I
heard a voice, saying,
24 Son of man, I have given thee
warning, yet thou hast not
warned the people, saying,
The word of the LORD came
unto me, saying,

CHAMAN
25 And it came to pass at the end of seven
years, that the word of the LORD came unto
me, saying,

26 I have given thee a lively warning,
of danger, lookouts or watch-
towers on high places, such
as gatehouses (2 Sam. 18:24) in
Kings 9:17). God gave His com-
mandments for the people's good (Deut.
33; 6:25; 10:12-13). If they were
obedient to the stipulations, they would
see never-ending blessing (Lev. 26:1-13;
Deut. 6:20; 28:1-14; Mal. 3:10-12). If the
people disobeyed these ordinances, the
and his hearers would surely die (Gen. 2:17;
2 Sam. 4:11-12; Acts 18:6).
3:20 To lay a stumblingblock before a per-
son was to expose him to danger (Job 6:21;
3:21). On warn the righteous man, see a
similar warning in 1 Cor. 10:12, "those who re-
sponded faithfully to the watchman's pro-
clamation would live. This is significant, as
physical life but the fullness of fellowship
with the Lord that flows from obedience."
3:24 Being shut in the house illustrates the
isolation among his fellow captives for
seven-year speechless
diabolically imposed speech-
less day of banishment; see also
3:27 Ezekiel remained
the intervals between
these aspects intimated
when it was announced
fallen (1 Cor. 13:8; Gal.
4:1). Sketching a city plan
not an uncommon prac-

U N D E R S T A N D | E X P L O R E | A P P L Y

Ezekiel; Daniel

זה ליהודה שמ
שכורים ה
בעצם הי
גנה
אזהרה
איש מלכות כסף
א יאכל בו בבית אח
חוצה ועצם לא תשכרו
אחו וכי יגור אהך גר יעש
כל זכר וא יקרב לעשתו והיו
ערל לא יאכל בו תורה אחת יהיו
ויזנוו כל בני ישראל באשר



HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

We all long for security. That's why we install alarm systems in our homes and set aside money in mutual funds and retirement plans. Since none of us can predict the future, we're drawn to anything that promises a little peace of mind, a hedge against our fears of the unknown.

Ezekiel's audience could relate. They were exiles, strangers living in a strange land. They had turned their backs on God and were suffering the consequences. And while they longed to go home someday, they struggled to believe that would ever happen.

Meanwhile, Daniel gave his readers even more to think about. His narratives reminded them that faithfulness comes with a price. That was a sizable challenge in itself. But his visions of the future described the rise of fierce kingdoms and only added turmoil to their already turbulent lives. Physical captivity in the present. Political chaos in the future. Little room for hope.

Yet both prophets proclaimed a God who remained in control of every situation in every generation. What's more, they reminded people of His faithful love. Yes, He was punishing His people for their sins, but He also promised the hope of something infinitely better if they would trust His plan.

All of this points to our need of Jesus and the life He offers. He's waiting to give you peace, just as He promised His children in Babylon centuries ago.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

CONTENTS

SESSIONS

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

<i>Dec. 5</i>	Session 1: Commissioned (Ezek. 3:8-21)	10
<i>Dec. 12</i>	Session 2: Saves (Ezek. 11:2-4,14-21)	20
<i>Dec. 19</i>	Session 3: Judges (Ezek. 24:1-14)	30
<i>Dec. 26</i>	Session 4: Sought (Matt. 2:1-12)	40
<i>Jan. 2</i>	Session 5: Warns (Ezek. 28:11-19,25-26)	50
<i>Jan. 9</i>	Session 6: Offers* (Ezek. 37:1-14)	60
<i>Jan. 16</i>	Session 7: Values (Ezk.16:20-21; 23:36-39; Ps.139:13-16) ...	70
<i>Jan. 23</i>	Session 8: Integrity Established (Dan. 1:8-21)	80
<i>Jan. 30</i>	Session 9: Demonstrate Allegiance (Dan. 3:14-26)	90
<i>Feb. 6</i>	Session 10: Humility Required (Dan. 4:28-37)	100
<i>Feb. 13</i>	Session 11: Trust Exhibited (Dan. 6:10-24)	110
<i>Feb. 20</i>	Session 12: Future Seen (Dan. 7:1-14)	120
<i>Feb. 27</i>	Session 13: Confession Made (Dan. 9:4-19)	130

*Evangelistic emphasis

MEET THE WRITER

Janice K. Meier wrote the introduction and commentaries for this quarter's studies on the Books of Ezekiel and Daniel. A gifted Hebrew student, Dr. Meier is particularly qualified to write Bible study materials, having earned a doctorate in Old Testament and Hebrew. She also served at Lifeway as a content editor for more than eighteen years, including several years as editor of *Explore the Bible*.

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FROM THE TEAM LEADER

The city in which I attended college had two competing, major daily newspapers. On Saturdays, I would spend part of my day in the library reading the most current edition of each paper. They reported on the same stories but from very different perspectives. Comparing related stories in each paper gave me a deeper understanding of the events and how different people might perceive or interpret the facts within a story.

When we read Ezekiel and Daniel, we find two men who were both living through Babylonian exile but experiencing it in very different ways. Ezekiel was serving on the outside, living among the ordinary exiles. Daniel was integrated into the Babylonian ruling class. While one warned his people about the coming discipline, the other stood strong in the face of a lion's den. Each lived faithfully for God, and each saw a future that included the restoration of God's people. Through both prophets, we understand the multifaceted sovereignty of God in an uncertain time.

As we study Ezekiel and Daniel, we can be encouraged knowing that God is in control at all times and in all things. We also can be encouraged knowing that God is working to refine and bring His people together. That was good news then, and it is good news now.

In His service,

G. Dwayne McCrary

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INTRODUCTION

What is a prophet? While we often associate a prophet's role primarily with foretelling the future, Scripture also identifies a prophet as one who speaks for another. While their prophecies often contain elements of prediction, the prophets' fundamental role involved calling God's people to repentance. The Lord gave Moses a clear definition of a prophet in Exodus 4:14-16. When Moses declined to speak to Israel as the Lord's mouthpiece, God permitted Aaron to speak instead. Aaron would tell the people what God told Moses. In the Old Testament, true prophets served as God's mouthpieces, while false prophets typically based their messages on what people wanted to hear. The Books of Ezekiel and Daniel focus on two genuine prophets who faithfully stood for the Lord and delivered His message, even at the risk of their lives.

EZEKIEL

Ezekiel, meaning "God strengthens," wrote the book bearing his name while exiled in Babylon. Taken in the second Babylonian deportation in 598 BC, Ezekiel settled with a group of exiles near Nippur. There, he received a vision of God's glory, along with a call to serve as His watchman and spokesman in 593 BC (Ezek. 1-3). Ezekiel likely lived in his own house near the Chebar River, an irrigation canal that channeled water from the Euphrates River into the surrounding area. He was married, though his wife died suddenly, and the Lord commanded him not to mourn her loss (Ezek. 24:15-24).

Ezekiel was a priest as well as a prophet (1:3). At age thirty, when priests normally were inducted into office (Num. 4:30), Ezekiel received God's call to deliver His message to the Jewish exiles (Ezek. 1:1). He ministered in Babylon from approximately 593-570 BC, often using symbolic actions to deliver God's words to the people. He often dramatized the Lord's message to make it more vivid to his audience. For example, chapters 4-5 record the prophet's dramatization of Jerusalem's siege and fall.

Ezekiel addressed at least six significant themes.

(1) *God is transcendent and holy.* As transcendent, the Lord is exalted above and over His world. For instance, Ezekiel received a vision of the Lord's glory on His chariot-throne, reigning over the world (1:1-28). God's people could have confidence that He still exercised dominion over His creation. And, as a holy God, He still administered divine justice, making Ezekiel a watchman to warn the people of impending judgment (3:16-21).

(2) *Sinfulness characterizes fallen humanity.* God's transcendence and holiness stand in marked contrast to the people's sinfulness. While prophets like Amos emphasized the social sins of God's people, Ezekiel went further by

identifying sin as the violation of the Lord's character and commandments (see 2:1-8; 8:7-18; 13:1-23; 17:1-21; 20:1-31). Judah had become so sinful that the Lord portrayed His glory as first departing the temple (10:18-19) and then as leaving Jerusalem altogether (11:22-25).

(3) *Judgment is inevitable when people refuse to repent.* Even after King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah in 605 BC, the people thought the Babylonians' intervention would be temporary. Ezekiel condemned false prophets who encouraged such unrealistic thinking (13:1-23). Not only would unbelievers face judgment, but also God's own people would be held accountable for their disobedience (6:8-10; 34:17-22).

(4) *We are individually responsible for our actions.* Ezekiel quoted a popular proverb of his time: "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2). The people quoted this proverb to excuse their wrongdoing, believing that they were suffering unjustly for the sins of previous generations. Ezekiel made clear that they were not innocent victims of the past. The Lord was judging their own sins. Through his teaching, Ezekiel demonstrated the difference between guilt for sin and consequences of sin. We are guilty before God for our own sins (18:4), but the consequences of our sins can affect generations to come.

(5) *The Lord offers hope.* Following messages of judgment, Ezekiel communicated hope for future restoration in chapters 33–48. He predicted not only the nation's return from captivity, but also its spiritual renewal and reunification—all leading up to a new Jerusalem. Central to that proclamation lay the promise of a new heart and a new spirit that would enable His people to faithfully obey God (11:17-20; 36:26-28). Through His death and resurrection, Christ fulfilled this promise (Matt. 26:27-29).

(6) *The Lord longs to bring to all nations the knowledge of His glory and greatness.* Even in judgment, God's purpose is redemptive. By communicating the knowledge of God, personal accountability for sin, and clear warnings of judgment, Ezekiel helped the exiles understand God's redemptive purpose for them and all people. Judgment in this life is based on the Lord's desire for everyone to experience His grace (Ezek. 18:21-32; 33:11-20).

DANIEL

Daniel, meaning "God is my Judge," wrote this book in the sixth century BC. When Daniel was approximately fifteen years old, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon transported him and other captives from Judah to Babylon following the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. Daniel lived in exile throughout the Babylonian Empire and into the period of Persian dominance.

In Babylon, Daniel's captors attempted to remove all traces of his nationality and religion. They gave him the Babylonian name Belteshazzar,

which means “protect the king’s life.” He also received training in Babylonian arts, letters, and wisdom. In time, he rose to a high governmental rank within the kingdom and later served under Persian rulers, as well.

Throughout his life, Daniel demonstrated unwavering faith in the Lord. He displayed courage in resisting the temptations and threats that he repeatedly faced. What enabled Daniel to remain steadfast in his commitment to God? He remained faithful, in part, because he recognized that God was his ultimate Judge.

Two distinctive features of the Book of Daniel stand out. First, a major portion of the book (Dan. 2:4b–7:28) was written in Aramaic, a Semitic language similar to Hebrew. Sections that held special relevance to Gentiles appear in Aramaic, while portions that most directly concerned the Jews were recorded in Hebrew. Second, the book includes apocalyptic literature along with its historical and prophetic material. The term “apocalyptic” refers to God’s revealing of truth through visions or dreams. Apocalyptic writing uses symbolic or figurative language to describe God’s future intervention in the world. (See “Understand the Context” in Session 12.)

The book’s main teachings can be summarized in the following points:

(1) *God’s sovereignty.* The Lord holds ultimate control over all history, individuals, and nations. Daniel lived during a time when Judah (Israel) had fallen to pagan powers. As a result, God’s people were tempted to think that He lacked sovereign power over the nations. The book refutes this idea. In the historical accounts of Daniel 1–6, God displays His sovereignty through deliverance. The apocalyptic material of chapters 7–12 reveals God’s ongoing rule over nations and empires.

(2) *God’s love and care for His followers.* The Lord’s love appears evident in His deliverance from harm and in His responses to His prophet’s prayers.

(3) *The person and work of the Messiah* (7:13-14; 9:24-27). Daniel referred to both Christ’s first and second advents and placed emphasis on His second coming. Centuries later, Jesus designated “son of man” as a messianic title for Himself (Mark 14:61-62).

(4) *Eschatology, the biblical doctrine of last things.* Daniel particularly predicted the tribulation of the last days and anticipated the new world that would follow. The Messiah will establish His kingdom and bring earthly powers to an end. Then, God will be glorified and believers will be rewarded.

(5) *Hope for God’s people during “the times of the Gentiles.”* The phrase, used by Christ in Luke 21:24, identifies a time between the Babylonian captivity and Christ’s second coming when Jews would live under Gentile powers. But since “the Most High God is ruler over human kingdoms” (Dan. 5:21), God’s people should not distress. Hope enables them to remain faithful because, in spite of appearances to the contrary, He is still in control.

OUTLINES

EZEKIEL

- I.** Israel, a Rebellious House, Will Fall (1:1–24:27).
- II.** Pagan Foreign Nations Will Be Destroyed (25:1–32:32).
- III.** Disciplined Israel Will Be Restored (33:1–48:35).

DANIEL

- I.** The Godly Remnant in the Times of the Gentiles (1:1–21).
- II.** God’s Sovereignty over the Times of the Gentiles (2:1–7:28).
- III.** God’s People in the Times of the Gentiles (8:1–12:13)



ON THE COVER

Ruins of the city walls of ancient Babylon, dating to the time of Nebuchadnezzar II. Still visible are some of the lions, bulls, dragons, and other images that decorated the walls. (See Session 10.)

Illustrator Photo / Murray Severance [74/4/9].

Commissioned

God calls people to consistently proclaim His truth.

We often need warnings to avoid danger, and those warnings can take various forms. Many warnings appear as lights—like the flashing signals at railroad tracks or the powerful beam from a lighthouse. Other warnings come through sounds, such as storm sirens or smoke alarms. And some warnings appear in print, like the warning labels on medications.

Many products come with directions regarding their use—and the hazards of improper use. It's important to heed those warnings if we're going to avoid disaster. In some cases the consequences of missing or ignoring warnings are not just inconvenient. They're fatal.

Of course, many warnings come through the words of other people. Mothers warn their children about touching hot stoves. Meteorologists inform listeners about inclement weather. Security guards alert individuals to potential threats to their physical safety or property.

One of the most famous verbal warnings in American history has been celebrated in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "Paul Revere's Ride." On the night of April 18, 1775, a Boston patriot named Joseph Warren summoned Paul Revere to ride to Lexington, Massachusetts, to warn colonial leaders of British troop movements. He was also instructed to alert militias in nearby towns. Through a midnight ride, Revere and his companion successfully accomplished that mission. The concluding lines of Longfellow's poem remind us that throughout history, in times of darkness and peril, people need to wake up and heed such words of warning.

Throughout biblical history God commissioned prophets to warn His people. Simply defined, a prophet speaks for God. In Scripture, the Lord put His message in a prophet's mouth and would hold that individual responsible for delivering His words (Deut. 18:18). Those messages often included a call to repentance and a warning about the consequences of persistent rebellion against the Lord (see Jer. 35:15-17).

This Bible study session introduces Ezekiel, a prophet that the Lord commissioned as a watchman. He was called to alert God's people to impending disaster if they refused to change their ways. And the Lord made clear that Ezekiel would be held accountable if he failed to issue the warning.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EZEKIEL 1:1–7:27

Ezekiel, whose name means “God strengthens,” experienced God’s power to carry out a difficult mission and to proclaim a difficult message. The prophet received God’s call five years after he had been taken as a captive to Babylon, along with King Jehoiachin of Judah and thousands of others (2 Kings 24:10-17). Thus Ezekiel’s ministry in Babylon began in approximately 593 BC.

Ezekiel was a member of the priestly line, but chapters 1–3 highlight his prophetic call. In chapter 1, Ezekiel recorded his vision of God’s glory. He saw a storm cloud with flaming, winged creatures in its midst. Each creature possessed both human and animal characteristics, and a large wheel with a rim full of eyes accompanied each creature.

Meanwhile, a throne appeared over an expanse, where a human form, surrounded by brilliant light, sat. Recognizing God’s glory, Ezekiel fell down, but the Lord lifted him and commissioned him to deliver a message to the rebellious people in Judah. As part of the commission, the Lord instructed Ezekiel to consume a scroll containing words of mourning and judgment.

The Spirit then transported him to the exiles at Tel-abib in Babylon, where he sat stunned for seven days. After that period, the Lord specified Ezekiel’s role as that of a watchman (Ezek. 3:17). His duty consisted of warning the people of God’s coming judgment. If he failed to deliver the message, the Lord would hold him accountable for the people’s deaths.

Chapter 4 records the first of the symbolic acts that marked Ezekiel’s ministry. Drawing a picture of Jerusalem on a tablet and staging a miniature siege of the city, the prophet used an object lesson to teach about God’s judgment. The Lord also directed Ezekiel to consume a restricted diet to illustrate that food rationing would accompany the siege.

In another symbolic act in chapter 5, Ezekiel shaved his head and face and divided the hair into three piles. The prophet burned one-third, destroyed another third with a sword, and threw the remaining third to the wind. This represented the coming destruction and exile of Judah. However, Ezekiel also preserved a few strands to represent the remnant that would survive.

Chapters 6–7 deal with prophecies of judgment. In chapter 6, the Lord pronounced doom on the nation’s high places—sites of false worship. The Lord was about to destroy these pagan shrines and those who worshiped there. He also promised to preserve a remnant who would someday acknowledge the Lord’s sovereignty. Chapter 7 announces the arrival of God’s judgment. Because of the nation’s arrogance and violence, that judgment would be thorough and inescapable.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PREPARED (Ezek. 3:8-11)

VERSE 8

Look, I have made your face as hard as their faces and your forehead as hard as their foreheads.

In preparing His prophet to deliver a judgment message, the Lord used a parallel expression, stating that He had made Ezekiel's **face as hard as their faces** and his **forehead as hard as their foreheads** ("thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads," KJV). The King James Version makes clear that the Lord's prophet would face strong opposition. In Hebrew thought, the *face* reflected an individual's attitudes, emotions, and dispositions. Thus, the term served as a proper substitute for the person or self. *Hard* also means "strong" or "powerful." When referring to the face or forehead, it implies strong resistance or unyielding persistence.

Interestingly, the word rendered *hard* derives from the same root as Ezekiel's name, which means "God hardens" or "God strengthens." The people's hard faces characterized them negatively as rebellious against the Lord. In contrast, Ezekiel's hardened face demonstrated a positive determination to convey the Lord's message in a difficult setting.

VERSE 9

I have made your forehead like a diamond, harder than flint. Don't be afraid of them or discouraged by the look on their faces, though they are a rebellious house."

The Lord encouraged Ezekiel through two comparisons. First, God compared the determined strength He had given Ezekiel to the hardness of a **diamond** ("adamant," KJV; "emery," ESV). The Hebrew word designates the stone on the tip of an engraving tool (Jer. 17:1). Next, **flint** identifies a hard stone that can be flaked to produce a sharp edge. Although Isaiah used a slightly different Hebrew term in Isaiah 50:7, he portrayed the Suffering Servant as setting his face like flint, intent on fulfilling God's purpose (see Luke 9:51).

As a result of the Lord's strength, Ezekiel need not fear his opponents nor allow them to discourage him. The verb translated **discouraged** conveys the basic idea of being broken. It describes the fear or panic of military leaders who have lost courage (Isa. 31:9, "will be afraid").

The Lord characterized the people of Judah as **a rebellious house**. The term for *rebellious* typically refers to the rebellion against God in either

words and actions. The word *house* possesses a range of meanings, including a dwelling, temple, and household or family. Here, it applies to the nation of Judah, the descendants of Jacob as a group.

VERSE 10

Next he said to me, “Son of man, listen carefully to all my words that I speak to you and take them to heart.

The designation **son of man** occurs more than ninety times in Ezekiel. The phrase **son of** can mean “having the characteristics of.” Thus, the title may designate Ezekiel as a human and emphasize his mortality—in contrast to God’s eternal majesty. The initial use of *son of man* here immediately following the revelation of the Lord’s glory in chapter 1 supports this view (Ezek. 2:1).

The title also could be rendered “son of Adam” because the Hebrew term for **man** is commonly transliterated into English as *adam*. In that case, it could be an allusion to creation, when God shared His life-giving breath with the first Adam (Gen. 2:7). In the Book of Ezekiel, the Lord’s Spirit entered a son or descendant of Adam, enabling him to carry out the Lord’s call.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Son of Man” on pages 1488-1489 of the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What did the writer identify as the most important occurrence of “son of man” in the Old Testament? What contrasting concepts are associated with its use as a title for Christ?

God instructed His messenger to **listen carefully** to His words. This Hebrew command literally means “hear with your ears,” but implies more than auditory reception. Ezekiel had to obey, acting in accord with God’s directives. The Lord reiterated this charge with **take them to heart**. In Hebrew thought, the *heart* represented one’s inner nature or referred to a person’s emotions, thoughts, or will. For Ezekiel, that meant understanding God’s words, but also obediently sharing them with the exiles (see Ezek. 3:11).

Ezekiel 3:10 also implies an ongoing relationship between the Lord and His prophet. Receiving God’s message did not end with Ezekiel’s commissioning. He had to continue listening to what the Lord said to him and continue speaking truth to a people who would not be receptive. This ongoing revelation would include messages of both judgment and hope.

VERSE 11

Go to your people, the exiles, and speak to them. Tell them, ‘This is what the Lord GOD says,’ whether they listen or refuse to listen.”

God commissioned Ezekiel to **go** to his **people**, the Jews in Babylon. In Hebrew, the command is repeated for emphasis (“go, get thee,” KJV). God instructed Ezekiel to deliver His message to the **exiles**, a term that comes from a verb meaning “to remove.” In Old Testament times, Assyrians and Babylonians both deported captives and settled them in other regions.

Scholars identify four Jewish deportations to Babylon. The first occurred in 605 BC when Nebuchadnezzar removed some of Judah’s brightest young men, including the prophet Daniel. A second deportation (598 BC) included Ezekiel. A third, larger deportation occurred in 587-86 BC when Jerusalem fell and the temple was destroyed (2 Kings 25:8-21). The final deportation (582 BC) followed the murder of the Babylonian appointed governor of Judah.

Like *go*, God’s command to deliver His message is repeated for emphasis (**speak, tell**). The expression **“this is what the Lord GOD says”** (“this is what the Sovereign LORD says,” NIV) signaled the authenticity of the prophet’s message. The last part of verse 11 stresses that Ezekiel should deliver the message faithfully, regardless of the people’s response. God had already prepared for a “hardheaded and hardhearted” audience (Ezek. 3:7).

The Lord prepared Ezekiel for a difficult mission of consistently proclaiming His truth. God also challenged him not to fear the people. God still equips people to deliver His words and to fulfill His calling.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Prophecy, Prophets” on pages 1303-1305 of the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How would you explain the statement “the prophets were not all-knowing but all-telling?”

OVERWHELMED (Ezek. 3:12-15)

VERSES 12-13

The Spirit then lifted me up, and I heard a loud rumbling sound behind me — bless the glory of the LORD in his place! — with the sound of the living creatures’ wings brushing against each other and the sound of the wheels beside them, a loud rumbling sound.

This transportation of Ezekiel occurred in a vision that he experienced under the Holy Spirit's control. At Ezekiel's commissioning, **the Spirit** had lifted him (Ezek. 2:2). Here, the Spirit also returned Ezekiel to the exiles and ended the vision. This lifting and transporting calls to mind the Spirit's role centuries earlier in the time of the Elijah (2 Kings 2:16-18; see Acts 8:39).

After being lifted, Ezekiel next heard **a loud rumbling sound** ("a voice of a great rushing," KJV; "the voice of a great earthquake," ESV). The Hebrew word rendered *sound* also means "voice," while *rumbling* indicates a "quaking" or "rattling." It can describe earthquakes (1 Kings 19:11; Amos 1:1), the "trampling" of warfare (Isa. 9:5), and the "rumbling" of chariots (Jer. 47:3). Elsewhere in the Book of Ezekiel, the term depicts God's sovereignty over His physical world (Ezek. 38:19-20).

Upon hearing the rumbling, Ezekiel responded with praise—**bless the glory of the LORD in his place!** The Hebrew word for *bless* signifies praise in this context, while the term translated *glory* comes from a verb meaning "to be heavy." Thus the noun can designate the weighty importance and shining majesty of God's presence. To *bless the glory of the LORD* recognizes the divine nature of the Lord, along with His sovereignty over all.

In some Old Testament contexts, glory is applied to people (Joseph, Gen. 45:13) and nations (Moab, Isa. 16:14). But the instability of human glory, cannot compare to the glory of God (Ps. 145:5). Often, it refers to a visible manifestation of God. As He dwells with people, He makes His reality and splendor known to them. Of course, nowhere is the majesty of His presence and character more fully displayed than in His Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:14).

The sounds of the **creatures' wings** and the rumbling **wheels** suggest the movement of the chariot throne and the conclusion of the vision that began in chapter 1. The term translated **rumbling** also appeared in verse 12.

VERSE 14

The Spirit lifted me up and took me away. I left in bitterness and in an angry spirit, and the LORD's hand was on me powerfully.

As the Spirit transported Ezekiel back to Tel-abib, the prophet reported **bitterness** and anger. Although the Hebrew word rendered *bitterness* can describe the taste of food (Deut. 32:32), it usually depicts an emotional response to a heartrending situation, such as barrenness (1 Sam. 1:10, "deeply hurt," CSB), family turmoil (Gen. 27:34), personal suffering (Job 7:11), the thought of death (1 Sam. 15:32), and the pain of crumbling hopes and dreams (Ezek. 27:30-31). *Bitterness* includes anguish and heavy-heartedness.

Ezekiel did not explicitly state the reason behind his strong reaction. He may have felt overwhelmed by the weight and disagreeable nature of his

commission and his audience's refusal to take his message to heart. Some scholars also believe that Ezekiel's response indicated grief that his visionary experience had come to an end. Whatever the case, **in an angry spirit** more literally means "in the heat of my spirit" (KJV, ESV). The Hebrew term translated *angry* comes from a verb meaning "to be hot." In many cases, it designates an emotional heat that rises from within a person. Such emotions can be kindled to varying degrees of intensity, including displeasure, anger, indignation, wrath, or rage.

Ezekiel's vision had begun with an acknowledgment of **the LORD's hand**, representing His power and authority, on the prophet (Ezek. 1:3). Similar words in Ezekiel 3:14 signaled the conclusion of the vision. Perhaps these words also indicated that the Lord's power controlled Ezekiel as he sat stunned at the wonder and horror of the vision.

VERSE 15

I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who were living by the Chebar Canal, and I sat there among them stunned for seven days.

The Spirit returned Ezekiel to **Tel-abib** ("Tel Aviv," NIV). This place name means "mound of the flood" or "mound of grain." It was located on the **Chebar Canal** ("the river of Chebar," KJV) near Nippur in Babylon. Some Bible scholars identify the Chebar Canal as a channel of the Euphrates River located southeast of the city of Babylon.

Following his return, Ezekiel sat **stunned** ("astonished," KJV; "deeply distressed," NIV; "overwhelmed," ESV) **for seven days**. Basic to the meaning of *stunned* is desolation resulting from a great disaster, often God's judgment. Ezekiel needed a week to get over the initial shock and hopelessness of what God had shown him. The prophet felt the weight of impending judgment and identified with the people in their crisis.

In contemporary culture, we also must attempt to understand unbelievers' emptiness so we can effectively witness to them. The weight of carrying God's message can be still be unpopular and can still feel overwhelming, but it remains an important task.

EXPLORE FURTHER

When have you wrestled with a sense of inadequacy or with feeling overwhelmed about a task God has given you? How did you deal with those emotions? What practical ideas would you share with others who are going through the same struggle?

ASSIGNED (Ezek. 3:16-21)

VERSES 16-17

Now at the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, I have made you a watchman over the house of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, give them a warning from me.

The number *seven* has significance in Scripture as a number of completeness. In Ezekiel 3:16, it may be significant for at least two reasons. First, mourning often lasted seven days (Gen. 50:10; 1 Chron. 10:12). Perhaps during this time, Ezekiel reflected on the death of his former role as priest and his new role as prophet. Second, the period of a priest’s consecration lasted seven days (Lev. 8:1-33). So, this may have been Ezekiel’s consecration as prophet-priest.

The word of the LORD came to me appears more than forty times in the book and emphasizes Ezekiel’s role as a true prophet. Genuine prophets did not speak on their own authority. They received God’s message and obediently delivered it to the people.

Here, we reach the crux of Ezekiel’s prophetic commission. Again, addressing the prophet as **son of man**, the Lord **made** (“appointed”) Ezekiel a **watchman over the house of Israel**. The Hebrew term for *watchman* comes from a verb meaning “to look out or about” and implies complete vigilance to avoid being surprised by a foe. In the ancient world, such an individual was stationed on the city wall with the responsibility of notifying leaders of danger (2 Kings 9:17-20). Failure often resulted in the death penalty.

The Lord emphasized Ezekiel’s role of warning others. **Give...a warning** can also mean “to teach” or “to send out light.” God appointed Ezekiel as His spiritual watchman to enlighten Judah and Jerusalem.

VERSE 18

If I say to the wicked person, ‘You will surely die,’ but you do not warn him — you don’t speak out to warn him about his wicked way in order to save his life — that wicked person will die for his iniquity. Yet I will hold you responsible for his blood.

In verses 18-21, the Lord detailed Ezekiel’s prophetic accountability as a watchman. Like a city’s watchman, Ezekiel’s role was designed to be redemptive, not harmful. Whether or not it was corrective, however, depended on the people’s response. The Lord had assigned Ezekiel the responsibility of warning a **wicked person**, a term that stands in contrast to God’s righteous character. Wicked people actively oppose God. They violate

others' rights by acting violently and dishonestly. Yet the Lord acts to redeem them by sending His prophet to alert them of potential judgment.

Ezekiel did not decide who was evil or righteous. Rather, the Lord initiated the warning based on His law and held individuals personally responsible for their sin. If they persisted in their evil ways, they would **die for** ("die in," KJV) their **iniquity**. The word for *iniquity* indicates "moral crookedness." In the Old Testament, sin and its penalty were not separate ideas. Actions and consequences were viewed as one process within the divine order. So, unconfessed sin inevitably would destroy an individual or community.

Ezekiel was **responsible** ("accountable," NIV) for delivering God's warning. The Hebrew text more literally reads "but his blood I will require at your hand" (ESV, see KJV). The wording conveys diligent seeking or exacting. The Lord's message is clear: Failure to share His warning carried severe consequences. Ezekiel would answer for the blood of those he failed to warn.

VERSE 19

But if you warn a wicked person and he does not turn from his wickedness or his wicked way, he will die for his iniquity, but you will have rescued yourself.

Here the Lord presented a different scenario. If Ezekiel warned the wicked individuals, but they continued to reject God's words, they would still die in their sins. However, the prophet would have **rescued** himself. This verb often refers to physical deliverance, but it can also include spiritual connotations.

VERSE 20

Now if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and acts unjustly, and I put a stumbling block in front of him, he will die. If you did not warn him, he will die because of his sin, and the righteous acts he did will not be remembered. Yet I will hold you responsible for his blood.

Here the scene shifts from the wicked to the **righteous** who depart from **righteousness**. The Hebrew terms rendered *righteous* and *righteousness* suggest a moral and ethical standard. In the Old Testament, that standard is the nature and will of God as revealed in the Mosaic covenant.

Faithfully obeying the law's stipulations enabled God's people to experience His blessings (Deut. 28:1-14). Disobedience resulted in covenant curses (28:15-68). Of course, obedience, not eternal security, is the issue here. Keeping the laws never provided salvation. Across Scripture, salvation is the result of faith, not works (see Gen. 15:6; Rom. 3:21-22; Eph. 2:8-9).

Ezekiel 3:20 describes one who turns from God and **acts unjustly** (“commit iniquity,” KJV; “does evil,” NIV; “commits injustice,” ESV). The Hebrew phrase identifies deeds that violate what is right. These behaviors run contrary to God’s nature, such as partiality in judgment, dishonesty, theft, murder, oppression, and improper speech (see Deut. 32:4; Job 34:10).

What is the significance of the Lord’s **stumbling block**? These people had already turned from God, so the term does not refer to a temptation from Him to sin, though some scholars do view it as a death sentence. More likely, it designates an obstacle to see how sinners would continue to respond.

If Ezekiel failed, the individual would **die because of his sin** (“die in his sin,” KJV “die for their sin,” NIV; “die for his sin,” ESV). Here, the Hebrew word for *sin* means “missing the mark.” The verb translated **remembered** is often associated with action. For example, God remembered His people in Egypt and acted to deliver them (Ex. 2:24). Thus, an individual’s righteous acts **not** being *remembered* is equivalent to withholding favor (see Ezek. 33:13).

VERSE 21

But if you warn the righteous person that he should not sin, and he does not sin, he will indeed live because he listened to your warning, and you will have rescued yourself.”

Here, the Lord stated the results for both the watchman who issued the warning and the **righteous person** who heeded it. The righteous person who turned because of God’s message would **live**. This verb conveyed not just physical existence, but also full fellowship with the Lord. Furthermore, the faithful watchman would **have rescued** himself.

How can we apply Ezekiel 3:8-21 today? First, we should warn others about the dangers of lapsing into sin (see 1 Cor. 10:12). Christians have a responsibility to hold each other accountable with humility (see Prov. 27:17; Gal. 6:1-2; Heb. 3:12-13). Second, we also are responsible to alert those without Christ to the consequences of their sin. This commission includes sharing the good news of the gospel with them (Matt. 28:18-20).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Watchman” on page 1640 of the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Read Isaiah 52:7-10 and Paul’s quotation of it in Romans 10:14-15. How are you taking responsibility for proclaiming God’s truth?