

Ezekiel Chapter 3

Ezekiel 3:1 "Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel."

Ezekiel was commanded to eat this roll (or scroll). This depicted the fact that he was first to receive the Word of God. He who would communicate God's Word must first assimilate it (Rev. 10:9-11). The fact that it was "written within and without" (meaning on both sides), is a picture of the extensive content of what God intended to communicate through him.

This is not physical food for his body but for the mind and the spirit of man. This is the Word of God that Ezekiel is to eat. For a person to be able to bring the Word of God to the people, he must first consume that Word for himself. The Word of God is a gift to man from God.

Ezekiel must fill himself to overflowing with that Word, and then when he opens his mouth, he will speak the Word accurately. Notice, one more time, Ezekiel must consume the roll, and then go speak the Word to the house of Israel.

Ezekiel 3:2 "So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll."

This is just explaining that Ezekiel is obedient to God. He opens his mouth and God fills his mouth with the Word. God's messenger must first internalize God's truth for himself, then preach it.

Ezekiel 3:3 "And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat [it]; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness."

The words of God were "sweet as honey" to the young prophet, as John also initially experienced when he "ate" the roll the mighty angel gave him (Rev. 10:8-11). The bittersweet message of God's grace and judgment brought bitterness to John's belly. Similarly, Ezekiel became "bitter," as he began his ministry to this "rebellious nation" (see verse 14). This scroll (as in Zechariah 5:1-4 and Revelation 5-6), is symbolic of the Word itself, with the message of judgment and tribulation written therein.

To just hear the Word is not enough. This is explaining the importance of the Word being down deep inside of us. Jesus explained it by saying, they have ears to hear, and they do not hear. They heard the Word that was spoken, but did not receive it within their selves. It had not become part of them.

The 24th chapter of Proverbs speaks of wisdom from God as being sweet as honey in the mouth. Wisdom is like the Word of God, they are both gifts from God. The Word of God is spoken of as food in the following verse.

Jeremiah 15:16 "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts."

Revelation 10:10 "And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter."

Ezekiel 3:4 "And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them."

Notice whose Words are to be spoken. The Word he speaks must be God's Word. Just as God put His Words in Jeremiah's mouth, He puts His Words into the innermost being of Ezekiel. When Ezekiel opens his mouth, God's Words will pour out.

This sets forth the second aspect of Ezekiel's calling. Not only was he to receive God's Word, but he was also to deliver it faithfully to Israel.

Ezekiel 3:5 "For thou [art] not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, [but] to the house of Israel;"

Ezekiel will not need an interpreter. He is Hebrew, the same as they are. They will be able to understand what Ezekiel brings to them from God, if they will accept it.

Ezekiel 3:6 "Not to many people of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee."

We see from the following Scripture, that a prophet is more acceptable to strangers, than by his own.

Matthew 13:57 "And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house."

Ezekiel 3:7 "But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel [are] impudent and hardhearted."

We know this is true. The very reason they are in captivity, is because they had turned against the teachings of the law that God had given them. They had worshipped false gods, which is breaking the very first commandment.

Ezekiel was warned at the outset of his ministry that the people would not listen to him.

They will not listen, because they are proud, arrogant people. They have hardened their hearts to the teachings of God.

Verses 8-9: "I have made thy face strong" What God commands (Do not be afraid), He gives sufficiency to do (I have made), so God will enable the prophet to live up to his name ("which means strengthened by God").

Ezekiel 3:8 "Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads."

"Their foreheads" symbolizes their minds. Their minds are so closed off; they will not accept the things Ezekiel brings them from God. They are like goats that butt heads, neither one wanting to yield.

Ezekiel 3:9 "As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they [be] a rebellious house."

"Adamant", in the verse above, is speaking of a stone. God has girded Ezekiel's mind, so that it is harder than a stone. God keeps reminding Ezekiel that He is his protection. Ezekiel must not let their threats, or angry looks, stop him from bringing the message that God sent to them. Fear is the opposite of faith. Ezekiel must place his faith in God.

It is sad to observe that the exile and affliction did not make the Jews more responsive to God; rather, they were hardened by their sufferings. God gave Ezekiel a "hardness" to surpass the people and sustain his ministry as prophet to the exiles.

Ezekiel 3:10 "Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears."

The fact that God calls Ezekiel, "son of man", is reminding Ezekiel that he is a man, and not God. Ezekiel's strength comes from God. This is the same as eating the Words of God. The Words of God must be received into the innermost being of Ezekiel.

This is the same message in the following Scripture.

Mark 13:11 'But when they shall lead [you], and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.'

The Words God wants him to speak will come in his ear and in his mouth.

Ezekiel 3:11 "And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear."

Just as Noah was to tell the people before the flood, Ezekiel was to go to the people here. They did not listen to Noah in his time, and they will not listen to Ezekiel in his time. He is to tell them anyhow. Maybe, someone will listen and repent.

Verses 12, 14 "Spirit lifted me up": This is a phrase used to describe the prophet being elevated to a heavenly vision (as in the experiences of 8:3 and 11:1).

Ezekiel 3:12 "Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, [saying], Blessed [be] the glory of the LORD from his place."

It is time now for Ezekiel to go and do the things God has told him to do. The Words of God are deep within him. He is ready. Sometimes it takes a little nudge from God to get going. The Spirit of God lifts him up, and gets him going.

This voice behind him could have been like the angels who constantly worship and adore God. Ezekiel's only reluctance is the fact that he might be rejected by his countryman. He is helped along by the Spirit which has lifted him.

Ezekiel 3:13 "[I heard] also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing."

This is the same rushing wind that was heard on day of Pentecost. The Spirit in the Word of God is what he hears. The wings, you remember, lift heavenward.

Ezekiel 3:14 "So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me."

The bitterness that he felt was the bitterness of knowing the rejection of his people. He is like many ministers, who feel they can do no good, but go anyhow.

Remember, the hand of God upon him, is bringing power to him to minister and gives enablement to Ezekiel to sustain him during his difficult ministry.

His pain came from the fact that his own people he knew would not accept the message he brought (which was told him in 3:7).

Ezekiel 3:15 "Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days."

Tel-abib was located in Babylonia and is not to be confused with the modern city of Tel Aviv in Israel. This was the main city for the Jewish captives, who may have included some of the 10 tribes taken long before in the conquering of the northern kingdom of Israel.

We see that God sent Ezekiel back to his home to minister to the people. Just as the priests were to wait 7 days before they went into the temple to minister, Ezekiel waited 7 days before bringing the message of God. You may read about this (in Leviticus chapter 8).

This was also the usual period for manifesting deep grief. He identified with them in their suffering (see Job 2 verse 13)

Ezekiel's astonishment was at the people for their lifestyle which was so far away from God. He was also astonished that God would have him bring this message to these rebellious people. There are several other times of waiting 7 days, such as the time Job's friends waited, and also the time when Noah was in the ark waiting for the rain to come.

Genesis 7:4 "For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth."

Verses 16-21: "The word of the Lord Came". Further confirming Ezekiel's call, God designates him as a watchman, like a sentinel on a city wall to alert the populace of danger. His responsibility is to warn the wicked of impending judgment, calling for spiritual change, but each hearer would experience the result of believing the message or the consequences for rejecting God's Word.

So it has always been among hearers of divine truth. Each sinner is responsible to God for his own reaction to the proclamation of the Word. Even now, the preacher must share the gospel, or be held accountable himself for failing to warn the wicked.

Ezekiel 3:16 "And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,"

It is interesting to me, that Ezekiel waited patiently until the LORD gives him instructions to proceed.

Seven, in the Bible, symbolizes spiritual completeness. This perhaps, is why he sat for 7 days waiting.

Ezekiel 3:17 "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me."

Further confirming Ezekiel's call, God designates him as a watchman, like a sentinel on a city wall to alert the populace of danger.

The "watchman" was a familiar figure in the ancient Near East. It was his duty to watch for approaching enemies and to warn the city of danger. In the same way Ezekiel was God's watchman who was called to warn both the "wicked" (verses 18 & 19), and the "righteous" (verses 20 and 21).

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Part of the 7 days of waiting by Ezekiel, was to allow him to see the sins of the people. A watchman, such as Ezekiel here, is to watch over the spiritual growth, or neglect of the people. Not only will he warn them, but will be able to give them specifics of what they are doing wrong. The warning is not from Ezekiel, but from God through Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 3:18 "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked [man] shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand."

This is a solemn warning to Ezekiel of how serious it would be to know of the sins of the people, and not warn them of God's anger about this. It goes so far as to say, if Ezekiel does not tell them, he will be guilty of their sins. We will deal with this same thing again in the 33rd chapter of Ezekiel. Ezekiel must bring the warning to the people exactly as God gives it to him.

Men are not to assume that ignorance, even owing to the negligence of preachers, will be any excuse to save them from divine punishment.

“To save his life” refers to physical death, not eternal damnation, though that would be a consequence for many. In the Pentateuch, God had commanded death for many violations of His law and warned that it could be a consequence of any kind of consistent sin.

Ezekiel 3:19 "Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul."

It is the obligation of Ezekiel to bring the warning. It is not his obligation for them to heed that warning. They are guilty themselves; if they do not heed the warning God has sent them through Ezekiel. He cannot force them to repent. They will have to do that on their own.

Though each sinner is responsible for his own sin, the prophet who is negligent in his duty to proclaim the warning message becomes, in God's sight, a manslayer when God takes that person's life.

The responsibility of the prophet is serious and he is responsible for the person's death (in the sense of Gen. 9:5).

The Apostle Paul had this passage, in view (in Acts 18:6 and 20:26; also Ezek. 33:6, 8).

Even for preachers today (there is such a warning in Heb. 13:17). Certainly, the consequence for such unfaithfulness on the preacher's part includes divine chastening and loss of eternal reward. (1 Cor. 4:1-5).

Ezekiel 3:20 "Again, When a righteous [man] doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand."

This is a very serious thing. This man has sinned with full knowledge. He has been walking with God in righteousness and then fallen away. The stumbling block is like a chastisement from God to cause him to repent and turn to God.

Here is a person who was obeying God by doing what was right, but fell into sin and God took his life in chastisement. The "stumbling block" was a stone of judgment that kills.

Psalms 119:165: "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble."

The crushing stone always falls on the disobedient. (Hebrews 12:9 says), it is better to obey and "live".

The sad thing in the verse here in Ezekiel, is the seriousness of the watchman not telling them of their sins. He is guilty of their sins, if he does not warn them.

Now during the church age, aren't we as Christians obligated as well to do the same thing?

Ezekiel 3:21 "Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous [man], that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul."

The warning, if it is received, benefits the righteous man and the watchman. Ezekiel will save the life of the one he warned, and save his own life as well. The prophet had done his duty.

Ezekiel 3:22 "And the hand of the LORD was there upon me; and he said unto me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee."

One of the most important things for Ezekiel, or any other minister of God, is to go only where God sends him. The quickest way to fail is to go on his own, without God sending him. The hand of the LORD brings him power to do what he is to do. In this case, God is sending him to a private place, where He can speak with him.

Ezekiel 3:23 "Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the LORD stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face."

The presence that Ezekiel sees is the same that he saw in the wheel (in chapter 1). The Spirit of God in the wheel is what Ezekiel saw.

Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord a second time. It was too much for Ezekiel. He fell on his face in total adoration and worship.

Ezekiel 3:24 "Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house."

Ezekiel was to fulfill much of his ministry at home, thereby limiting it to those who came to hear him there. This refers to limited fellowship with the people in order to maintain his role as leader.

Ezekiel 3:25 "But thou, O son of man, behold, they shall put bands upon thee, and shall bind thee with them, and thou shalt not go out among them:"

These bands are not literal but spiritual.

On one hand, they could be the inner bands or ropes of depressing influence which the rebellious Jews exerted on his spirit. Their perversity, like ropes, would repress his freedom in preaching.

More likely they imply the restraint that God placed on him by supernatural power so that he could only go and speak where and when God chose.

Ezekiel 3:26 "And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they [are] a rebellious house."

"Thou shalt be dumb" was a prophecy that Ezekiel would be unable to speak except by divine permission. This would be a sign to Israel that when Ezekiel did speak his words, they were certainly from God.

3:27 "But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbeareth, let him forbear: for they [are] a rebellious house."

Ezekiel was not to speak primarily, but to act out God's message. The prohibition was only partial, for on any occasion (verse 27), when God did open his mouth (as He often did in chapters 5 - 7), he was to speak.

The end of such intermittent dumbness with regard to his own people closely synchronized with Ezekiel's receiving a refugee's report of Jerusalem's fall. He also spoke with regard to judgments on other nations (in chapters 25 - 32).

The Words that come from Ezekiel's mouth will be the Words that God placed in his inner-most being, when Ezekiel ate the roll. It is God speaking to the people through the heart of the prophet. Ezekiel will be speaking as an oracle of God. It is God's message in the mouth of Ezekiel. Ezekiel must speak the Words. The people will either receive the message, or reject it. Their sins will be their own, because Ezekiel warned them. They are rebellious and may not receive the message, but that is not Ezekiel's responsibility. Their sins will be their own responsibility.

Ezekiel Chapter 3 Questions

1. What did God instruct Ezekiel to eat in verse 1?
2. What is this for?
3. For a person to bring the Word of God, he must first do what?
4. Did Ezekiel obey God?
5. What did God call Ezekiel in verse 3?
6. In the 24th chapter of Proverbs, how is wisdom spoken of?
7. Whose Words are to be spoken by Ezekiel?
8. What will happen, when Ezekiel opens his mouth?
9. Why will Ezekiel not need an interpreter?
10. Why will they not hear what Ezekiel says?
11. What does the forehead symbolize?
12. They are like _____ that butt heads?
13. What does adamant mean?
14. _____ is the opposite of faith.
15. Why is God calling Ezekiel "son of man"?
16. Is Ezekiel to speak to them, even if he knows they will not listen?
17. What is verse 12 telling Ezekiel?
18. What lifts Ezekiel up?
19. Ezekiel's only reluctance is because of what?
20. What is the rushing in verse 13 like?
21. Ezekiel went in _____.
22. What brings him the power to minister?
23. What city was he taken to?
24. How long did he sit in astonishment?

25. Name some others that waited this same length of time?
26. What was his astonishment of?
27. Ezekiel was made a _____.
28. What will happen to Ezekiel, if he does not warn the people?
29. It is the obligation of Ezekiel to bring the _____.
30. When a righteous man turns from his righteousness, what happens?
31. Who does the warning benefit if it is heeded?
32. What was the presence of God that Ezekiel sees this time?
33. When the Spirit entered Ezekiel, what did He tell him to do?
34. How is Ezekiel's tongue spoken of in verse 26?
35. Who opens Ezekiel's mouth?
36. What will Ezekiel say to the people?