

Ezekiel's Call

Bible Background • [EZEKIEL 1-3](#)
Printed Text • [EZEKIEL 3:1-11](#)
Devotional Reading • [EZEKIEL 17:22-24](#)

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE God's call of Ezekiel; AFFIRM that like Ezekiel, we have an obligation to speak to people who obstinately refuse to listen; and SHARE ways to be "harder than flint" in obeying God's call to be His messengers.

In Focus

Nathan and his Christian support team held prayer meetings in preparation for their presentation to the board members of their company. The company had been founded with Christian principles in mind, but over time the employees had fallen into selfishness. His coworker prayer team tackled major issues including misuse of company time for outside interests, unfair labor practices, bribing the judicial review board, and fraud in payroll and financial matters. After years of failing to hear warnings, employees were set in their ways and would not listen to the few who wanted to do right to save the company. Nathan had a vision and plan for restoring the company and preventing bankruptcy.

Nathan led the team in prayer. They studied company documents and reports, researched data on similar companies that were successful, and looked at financial forecasts for the future, using this information to build an impressive business plan. Nathan believed the prayer team had an obligation to speak truth even if met with criticism. He prayed that God would help him speak truth with full faith and not waver in the face of criticism and hostility. He was sure that if fellow employees were willing to listen and follow the vision, the company could be saved.

In today's lesson, we will affirm that whether people listen to the Word of God or fail to listen is up to them; however, we are obligated to speak the truth to a rebellious world. Have you ever faced rejection for speaking the truth?

Keep in Mind

"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. 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" ([Ezekiel 3:10-11](#) )

KJV

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.

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

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.

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

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

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

NLT

Ezekiel 3:1  The voice said to me, "Son of man, eat what I am giving you—eat this scroll! Then go and give its message to the people of Israel."

2 So I opened my mouth, and he fed me the scroll.

3 "Fill your stomach with this," he said. And when I ate it, it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

4 Then he said, "Son of man, go to the people of Israel and give them my messages.

5 I am not sending you to a foreign people whose language you cannot understand.

6 No, I am not sending you to people with strange and difficult speech. If I did, they would listen!

7 But the people of Israel won't listen to you any more than they listen to me! For the whole lot of them are hard-hearted and stubborn.

8 But look, I have made you as obstinate and hard-hearted as they are.

9 I have made your forehead as hard as the hardest rock! So don't be afraid of them or fear their angry looks, even though they are rebels."

10 Then he added, "Son of man, let all my words sink deep into your own heart first. Listen to them carefully for yourself.

11 Then go to your people in exile and say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says!' Do this whether they listen to you or not."

The People, Places, and Times

Ezekiel. The prophet's name meant "God is my strength." He was a Zadokite priest, the son of a priest named Buzi. Ezekiel lived in Jerusalem before being taken captive to Babylon where he lived near the Kebar River during the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. He was given a message and a vision of God's magnificence and power to fortify him to preach the Word to the first Jewish exiles relocated in Babylon where they would spend seventy years in slavery. He also prophesied warnings of judgment to surrounding ^[1]enemy nations.

Babylonia. God raised up Babylonia to conquer and punish Assyria for its brutality to Israel. Judah brazenly continued their idolatry and sin after repeated warnings from several prophets and after their relatives in Israel were defeated and enslaved. The Babylonians captured Judah and destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel's prophecies of judgment, restoration, and a new Temple relate to events before the fall of Judah, 592–587 BC; during the fall, 586 BC; and after the fall, 585–570 BC; over a period of 22 years.

Background

Ezekiel was a priest in Jerusalem at the end of the kingdom of Judah, as well as a contemporary of Jeremiah. Because he had authority, he was exiled to Babylon along with King Jehoiachin in 597 BC at the age of 25. His first vision (Jeremiah 1) is reported to have taken place five years later (592 BC) while in exile along the Chebar Canal, which connected with the Euphrates in the Nippur region. When his beloved wife died suddenly, he focused on his prophetic calling instead of bereavement, demonstrating that God's will over our lives takes precedence over every other duty, including mourning for a loved one, building, city, or past life ([Ezekiel 24:15–24](#)^L). The death of the prophet's wife was a sign of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans and the loss of the Temple. God may take all that seems dearest to us, but Ezekiel demonstrates that we should not weep for our afflictions, but yield our broken heart and mourner's prayers as acceptable before God to renew our hope.

At-A-Glance

1. God's Call to Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 3:1](#)^L)
2. Ezekiel's Response (vv. 2–3)
3. Ezekiel's Mission (vv. 4–9)
4. People's Response (vv. 10–11)

In Depth

1. God's Call to Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 3:1](#))

“Eating the Word of God” is an occurrence found in Ezekiel and in the New Testament book of Revelation, as John is called to eat the book that was in the hands of the angel ([Revelation 10:9–10](#)). Those chosen to eat the Word were also chosen because of their faithfulness to deliver God's message no matter the opposition. Several verses use the word “scroll” in Old Testament prophecy (e.g. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah) as the conveyance of God's Word. God's instructions are to eat and fully chew on the Word, and experience the sweetness of His Word in preparation to confront the bitter hardness of human hearts.

God's Word must be digested and consumed. We digest His Word with full recognition that we are “sons of man,” frail and humble dust without the sustaining Word of God. After the command to eat, Ezekiel was commanded to go and speak. We too are called, like Ezekiel, to eat God's Word, then go and speak truth and light to a dying world.

2. Ezekiel's Response (vv. 2–3)

There is only one acceptable response to a divine message and vision: obedience. Ezekiel did two things: he opened his mouth, and he ate the scroll. Now that Ezekiel proved faithful and allowed the Lord to prepare him, he was given his assignment to speak. His response to obey is immediate; he doesn't hesitate to obey the voice of God.

The scroll Ezekiel is commanded to eat contains “lamentation, mourning, and woe” (2:10). This kind of message might be thought to be bitter or sour, but in Ezekiel's mouth, it is as sweet as honey.

In several passages, written documents have the power to affect the course of human events ([2 Samuel 11:14–15](#); [1 Kings 21:8–9](#), [11](#); [Esther 8:8](#), [10](#)). By eating the scroll, Ezekiel becomes one with the words on the scroll. In doing so, he symbolically takes into his inner being the fate of his people. Ezekiel is more than just a messenger detached from his assignment; he has now become the message.

3. Ezekiel's Mission (vv. 4–9)

God's command to Ezekiel requires that he put the sweetness of the Word to urgent use: to go to Judah and tell them now. Right after Ezekiel had eaten the Word of God, tasted its sweetness, been filled with the Spirit, and personally seen God's glory, God commanded him to go right away and tell the people of Judah the consequences of their sin. Ezekiel was able to do this because he had first submitted to the Word of God and yielded his heart; he was equipped to boldly go and tell his fellow Israelites what God said.

Ezekiel is to speak God's words, not his own words. When we evangelize or minister to others, we must be careful to speak God's words, not our opinion or interpretation. Memorize and meditate on His Word, and then you can readily speak His Words in hostile environments and give hope even during trials.

4. People's Response (vv. 10–11)

Ezekiel was called to preach in his own country, to his own people, in his own language—to fellow Israelites, not the Babylonians. God explained that if He had sent him to minister to the Babylonian captors, “they would listen!” In other words, Israel was more hardened than the worst of the nations around them.

Language barriers can be overcome; but a hardened head and heart are another matter. Ezekiel

was not to take it personally when his message from God was rejected; Israel’s spiritual deafness was acquired over many years of turning away from His Word. Time after time in the Scriptures, we read of Israel choosing to reject God. This is no different. Regardless of their spiritual receptivity, Ezekiel is called to preach to the people of Judah.

Search the Scriptures

1. What did God command Ezekiel to eat? Why ([Ezekiel 3:3](#))?
2. The Lord said the Israelites were hard-hearted and stubborn. How did this happen (v. 7)?

Discuss the Meaning

By eating the scroll, Ezekiel takes into his inner being the fate of his people. How does Ezekiel exemplify servanthood and how is his mission symbolic of Jesus’ example of servanthood and the sacrifice of His body and blood?

Lesson in Our Society

Many adults remember times when a positive experience “sweetened” their lives in the midst of discouragement and doubt. Many times we doubt our ability to overcome hindrances and feel alone in standing up for what is right. We can easily become discouraged when obstacles prevent us from reaching our goals. God wants us to read, study, memorize, pray, and discuss His Word so that we become bold when we speak before a person or crowd.

Make It Happen

When we reflect on God’s unfailing promises and the many examples He has presented in His Word, we should be encouraged to overcome hostile situations. List the different potentially hostile situations you could face personally as a witness for Christ. Ask God to make you hard as flint in order to obey Him when the time comes.

More Light on the Text

[Ezekiel 3:1–11](#)

The ministry of Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, extended from 593–571 BC, and mostly took place around Tel Abib, near the Chebar Canal in Babylon (modern-day Iraq), during the Babylonian Captivity (605–538 BC). He was one of approximately 10,000 inhabitants of Judah exiled to Babylon in 597 BC when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem. King Jehoiachin and many of his subjects, including warriors, artisans, and many members of the royal and priestly families, were taken away to captivity in Babylon ([2 Kings 24:14–16](#)). Five years after this mass deportation, when Ezekiel turned 30, the heavens opened and he saw visions of God (1:1), beginning his prophetic calling.

The first three chapters describe Ezekiel’s call and commission. Chapter 1 gives an extravagant account of a fiery vision of God’s glory that caught Ezekiel’s attention. Chapter 2 begins to tell what Ezekiel heard from the Lord—how he was being sent to speak to the rebellious Israelites. However, before he begins his mission, he must prepare. He must eat the scroll of the Word of God—where chapter 3 begins, continuing the story of Ezekiel’s preparation for the ministry of a prophet. The section of chapter 3 in this lesson concludes this discourse with Ezekiel actually

eating the scroll. It also repeats the words of encouragement that God gave to Ezekiel in the preceding chapter. Ezekiel certainly needed such encouragement when faced with the daunting task of speaking to hard-headed and ^[1]~~stiff~~ hard-hearted people.

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

God speaks to Ezekiel and calls him “mortal.” Most translations have “son of man” (Heb. ben ‘adam, **bin-ah-DAHM**) instead, a term that occurs about ninety times in the book of Ezekiel. This is not the “son of man” that Daniel speaks of in [Daniel 7:13^L](#), nor the “Son of Man” of the New Testament, used as a title for Jesus Christ. Rather, when God calls Ezekiel the “son of man,” it is only to recognize that Ezekiel was a mere human being, regardless of the mighty visions that he sees or his high calling. The title was used to stress the human nature of the agent over the divine source of the message. God would powerfully use this mere human being to rebuke the house of Israel through lofty visions that set him higher than other prophets. This sanctified son of man would often be discouraged and frustrated, just like any other human being. His ministry would be tested by doubt, frustrations, and rejection. In the midst of all this, God would strengthen him, and only as a God-strengthened mortal would he be able to face Israel.

Before he is sent to speak to the rebellious Israelites, God tells Ezekiel to eat the scroll presented to him earlier ([Ezekiel 2:8^L](#)). The order to eat the scroll appears three times (2:8; 3:1, 3). When the scroll first appears, Ezekiel is admonished not to be rebellious, and as if to test him, God tells him to “open your mouth and eat what I give you.” Thus, he has no opportunity to make any excuses, and no choice but to obey—both to eat the scroll and then to go speak to Israel.

Before the prophet can speak to the house of Israel, he must devour the Words of God. Ezekiel must admit the Word into his own heart, imprint it onto his mind, and ruminate upon it so that his soul may be nourished and strengthened by it. Similarly, today ministers and preachers of the Gospel must, in their studies and meditations, feed upon that Word of God they will preach to others. In addition, Jeremiah said, “When your words came, I ate them” ([Jeremiah 15:16^L](#)). The Word must become meat and drink to the minister—heated upon the fire of prayer—before they are shared with God’s church.

Ezekiel was told to eat what is offered to him, so he does not have the luxury of choosing what to eat. Whatever God offers, he must eat. Of course, whatever word of God that the Spirit delivers to us, we must receive it without hesitation. What we find on the table set before us in the Scripture, we must eat. God chooses the menu and sets the curriculum. For Ezekiel, words of misery were on the menu. On both sides of Ezekiel’s scroll were written many words of lamentation, mourning, and woe (2:10). The circumstances of his ministry needed such a word—he was speaking on behalf of an angry God to an apostate nation receiving its share of judgment. Certainly, more than half the book of Ezekiel is about calamities that would come upon Judah. His general message, thus, reflects the writings on the scroll—essentially a message of judgment followed by one of restoration, based on a covenant relationship between God and Israel. Judgment came because of a double tragedy—the people’s rebellion against God’s revealed will and their false belief that they enjoyed eternal security.

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

Ezekiel followed the instruction to open his mouth. Only after opening the mouth was he given

the scroll. Obeying God is usually a step-by-step journey. God is usually patient, and waits for us to obey the first step before taking us to the second step. Any reluctance to obey on our part only delays the journey, causing God to repeat instructions until we finally ^[1]_{SEP} give in.

Again, Ezekiel was told to eat the scroll—the third and final repetition. This time, the request had an extension: “fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee” Ezekiel had to eat the scroll until it filled his stomach with the Word of God, the bread of heaven. He must fill himself with God’s Word until there is no room for his own words.

Here, the Scripture says that Ezekiel finally ate the scroll—and it was sweet. Ezekiel might have expected the scroll to taste bad; after all, gloomy words were written upon it. The Word of the Lord always brings life even when it does not sound appetizing to the mind. Ezekiel obeyed God, and what looked unpalatable became sweet. If we also readily obey even the most difficult of God’s commands, we shall find comfort in knowing that He makes all things beautiful in His own time.

Ezekiel’s eating of the scroll teaches us a few valuable symbolic lessons. First, the words he spoke would not be his own, but the Word of God. Second, the Word of God is assimilated into the prophet’s being to become his very life. Third, the obedient act of eating the scroll indicates Ezekiel’s acceptance of the commission God was giving him.

4 And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. 5 For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; 6 Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. 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.

Finally, the Lord sends Ezekiel to speak to the house of Israel, encouraging him because the task ahead was daunting. He is not sent to a people of “strange speech.” The word for “strange” is ameq (**ah-MEK**), which means deep and unfathomable. In other words, unintelligible. He is not sent to people of “of an hard language.” “Hard” (kated, **kah-BED**) in this context means heavy in the sense of difficult or burdensome to understand. He is sent to the Israelites, to reprove them for their sins. An instruction that Ezekiel had received earlier is also repeated here: “Speak with my words to them” (2:4). Thus, Ezekiel must speak to the Israelites all that God had spoken to him, and only that. However, the people will not listen, not because they do not understand him or his language, but because they are impudent and hard-hearted.

Ezekiel has been prepared well—having eaten the scroll and assimilated its words inside him. Now he must prophesy God’s Word to the people. They are his own people, the house of Israel, which makes his task especially difficult. As an exile who understood their situation, Ezekiel hoped that Israel would listen. They had gone through many tribulations together. But on the other hand, the Israelites were intent on not listening to God at all. They had chosen to defy God. God says that if He had sent Ezekiel to a foreign nation, his message would have been effective. Despite speaking different languages, they would understand God’s message. But His own people were too stubborn to listen to Ezekiel. They had turned away from God. They were even worse than the nations around them.

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

Ezekiel is sent to a hardheaded and hardhearted people, who would choose to ignore God's messenger and his message. These people take pride in disrespecting God's messenger and confronting the message. They stubbornly closed their minds and would not even listen. More than that, they fiercely opposed Ezekiel and refused his message. The task before Ezekiel is almost impossible; no matter what he does, the people will not change. However, even if they do not listen, they will know that a prophet has been among them (2:5 and 33:33).

Thus, God made Ezekiel strong-hearted like the Israelites to whom he would be speaking. He needed to be bold, resilient, stubborn, and unyielding in order to cope with his stiff-necked audience. God promises His prophet that He has already imbued him with the firmness and boldness necessary for his cause, making him as unyielding and hardened as his audience. Indeed, God made Ezekiel "adamant" (shamiyr, **sha-MEER**), or hard as a diamond. As Ezekiel's name suggests, God strengthened him, and made his heart harder than flint. He had to be hard headed to reach hard-headed Israel.

Our world today demands such hardening for God's servants. Bringing His Word to our society is declaring something very counter-cultural to a people who, like Israel in Ezekiel's day, do not want to listen to God. Most cultures around the world, including the post-Christian cultures of the West, are outright antagonistic to the Christian message of the narrow road and only Savior. Ministers of God in such places must depend on Him for strength. It will take some flintheartedness to speak God's Word today and overcome the many obstacles that come our way. Doubts and fears will attempt to cripple our message. Opposition, both to God's message and God Himself, is to be expected. However, we have good news: those prophets whom God calls and sends, He also equips and strengthens.

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. 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.

Finally, as we draw toward the end of the commissioning, God admonishes Ezekiel to pay careful attention to everything He says. Ezekiel has to receive what God says with his heart and hear with his ears—he must listen carefully to what God will continue to say. He has to assimilate the Word of God until it becomes a part of him; then he can speak it with confidence and conviction. His mission was to tell the Israelites what the Lord had said and that the Lord had said it. He had to speak to them whether they listened or not—and they would not listen. Judging solely by whether the people listened, it would seem that Ezekiel's ministry failed miserably. However, this is not true; his task was only to speak what God told him. Whether the people changed is not Ezekiel's business; all he had to do was speak the Word.

Say It Correctly

Jehoiachin. juh-**HOY**-uh-kin.

Chaldeans. kal-**DEE**-ens.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Ezekiel, the Lord's Messenger

([Ezekiel 2:1-7](#))

TUESDAY

Words of Lamentation, Mourning, and Woe

([Ezekiel 2:8-10](#))

WEDNESDAY

Eat the Scroll and Prophecy

([Revelation 10:8-11](#))

THURSDAY

Written Edict Stops Jewish Calamity

([Esther 8:7-10](#))

FRIDAY

Sentinel Must Convey God's Message

([Ezekiel 3:12-21](#))

SATURDAY

Israel Exalted at Last

([Ezekiel 17:22-24](#))

SUNDAY

Ezekiel's Call

([Ezekiel 3:1-11](#))