

Ezekiel 2-3 • When God Calls a True Prophet

Introduction

The old saw, “Be careful what you wish for – you may get it” is certainly true in the case of most people’s desire for a prophet – a **TRUE** prophet of God, that is. Many people claim the title of prophet who elicit a large following because they promote a message that people **want** to hear rather than what they **need** to hear. True prophets of God come only in times of extreme spiritual distress and generally as God’s last resort after people have rejected all other forms of His Word. Once you truly understand the mission and calling of a true prophet of God, you will never wish to see one. It would mean you’re in so much trouble, that it may be too late.

^{2:1}Then He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!” ²As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me. ³Then He said to me, “Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. ⁴I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’ ⁵As for them, whether they listen or not—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them. ⁶And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house. ⁷But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.

[Read 2:1-7]

Q: Why did Ezekiel need to be stood on his feet? Why wasn’t he already standing?

A: Chapter 1 opened with God revealing to Ezekiel the vision of His glory. As it approached him personally and God began speaking to him, he fell on his face. (Ezekiel 1:28)

Point: This is the most common reaction throughout the Bible by those who find themselves in God’s presence. Examples are Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, Peter, and so on. A true, personal encounter with God is a humbling, even frightening experience that makes the contrast between Almighty God and merely mortal man crystal clear that man is not able to even stand on his own in the presence of the One True God.

Q: What is significant about God calling Ezekiel “Son of man”?

A: Other than a single instance in which this is applied to Daniel (Daniel 8:17), it is applied to no other prophet except Ezekiel, of whom it is used more than 90 times. It seems to be a reminder to both Ezekiel and the reader that although great visions are revealed to him, Ezekiel is still but a frail, human being. In the Gospels, Christ is referred to at least 80 times as the “Son of man”, the capitalized version a reminder of His dual nature as both God and man while appearing during His earthly ministry.

Point: True prophets are meek and humble, always keenly aware of their lowly relationship to the One True God and never assuming or even encouraging their own elevation. One of the things revealing a false prophet is their insistence on respect and insulation for their office and exalting themselves. The true prophet has “lost” himself; the false is full of himself.

Q: What might be significant about God’s description of “the sons of Israel” as “a rebellious people”?

A: The word used for “people” is the same word that is usually used to describe Gentiles. In the original language and to Jewish ears of the time, this phrase would strongly convey the fact that their disobedience has been so complete that they’re in danger of losing their special status as His chosen people. It compliments what God declared through Hosea:

And the LORD said, “Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not your God.”

Hosea 1:9

[Continued on the next page.]

Q: What are the terms God uses in v.3-4 to describe Israel's spiritual condition? What do they have in common and what do they combine to portray?

A: "Rebellious" (v.3), "transgressed against Me" (v.3), "stubborn" (v.4), and "obstinate" (v.4). They all have in common that one must consciously and intimately know the things they are rejecting and willfully choosing to go against it. They combine to portray the consequences of their rejection of God personally. It's like someone having taken the wedding vows and wearing the wedding ring who commits adultery; there's no way they can say they're not willfully and knowingly rejecting their spouse.

Q: Is God saying in v.5 that it doesn't matter whether or not they respond to Ezekiel?

A: No, God is setting personal parameters for Ezekiel. He is calling Ezekiel to the highest level of personal accountability, that he should maintain a faithful relationship with God **REGARDLESS** of how others react to God's Word through Him. It's another teaching that God judges each individual heart, even the heart of a prophet, holding them accountable not for what other people do, but the individual. In Ezekiel's case, v.6-7 encourage him to ignore their reaction no matter how egregious and stick to the personal task at hand, "But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not".

Q: Why do you suppose v.6-7 sound so negative? Why does God seem to set the lowest expectations of success for Ezekiel?

A: God is not sending Ezekiel to people who have never heard of God's salvation nor who are seeking a remedy for their sinful condition; He is sending him to "a rebellious house", a people who know **exactly** what they have rejected. They will not merely actively oppose God's Word through Ezekiel, but react by attacking it. Rebellion is actually more than just rejection, but an active war to break away and sever all ties.

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:6-8

Point: True biblical prophets act like evangelists, only to God's people. They are reaching out to those steeped in sin, calling them back to the Lord. Just like evangelists, they have to keep their spiritual integrity intact, resisting against becoming like those around them and reaching out to everyone whether or not God's message through them is accepted.

[Read 2:8-3:3]

Q: So what does v.8 teach as the defining contrast that differentiates the faithful from the rebellious?

A: Whereas the rebellious refuse to listen to and put into practice God's Word, the faithful don't merely listen but consume, and are therefore consumed by, God's Word.

Q: Why should the example of God requiring Ezekiel to eat a scroll be familiar to us?

A: It is a repeated occurrence in Scripture illustrating that the most

⁸"Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you."

⁹Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it.

¹⁰When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe.

^{3:1}Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go,

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...speak to the house of Israel.”

²So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. ³He said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.” Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.

important thing to man is God's Word. This same thing happened to Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16) and John (Rev. 10:9-10). God's Word is supposed to become a part of us. This was the core meaning of the manna given to Israel in the wilderness.

“He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.

Deuteronomy 8:3

Q: What happened before God's Word was consumed?

A: “He spread it out before me”. It was fully read and understood.

Q: What might be significant that “it was written on the front and back”?

A: Scrolls were usually only written on one side. But in the case of something particularly important and large, it was written on both sides. So this is something of extra-special importance. This was also the case for John. (Rev. 5:1)

Q: How is a message of “lamentations, mourning and woe” appropriate to Ezekiel's calling?

A: They represent a spectrum of responses to God's judgment depending on whether or not they're accepted. In biblical terms, a “woe” is a pronouncement of what will inevitably happen to someone who continues, unrepentant, on their present course. “Lamentations” and “mourning” express what will be experienced by those who repent but still must endure judgment side-by-side with the unrighteous, although they will avoid final, eternal destruction. It's like when Jehoshaphat wrongly allied himself with Ahab and went to war with him; he escaped with his life, but he suffered defeat along with the rest.

Q: What is the greater meaning behind eating the scroll?

A: God's prophets must personally appropriate God's truth for their self before speaking it to others. This is more clearly explained in v.3:10:

Moreover, He said to me, “Son of man, take into your heart all My words which I will speak to you and listen closely.”

Q: Why do you suppose that whenever a person eats God's Word, it is described as “sweet as honey in my mouth”?

A: Truly hearing and receiving God's Word is just such an incredible, initial sensation. It is described like this elsewhere in Scripture. (Ps. 119:103; Jer. 15:16; Rev. 10:9) For those **NOT** in rebellion, but who earnestly seek a closer relationship with God, they **want** to consume as much of His Word as possible.

Point: *True prophets of God are immersed in, consumed, and ruled by God's Word. They are living examples of what they teach. Whereas false prophets try to pervert God's Word or add to it in some manner, true prophets always live according to it and their message can be corroborated according to God's Word.*

⁴Then He said to me, “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. ⁵For you are not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, but to the house of Israel, ⁶nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to them who should listen to you; ⁷yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate. ⁸Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces and your forehead as hard as their foreheads. ⁹Like emery harder than flint I have made your forehead. Do not be afraid of them or be dismayed before them, though they are a rebellious house.”

¹⁰Moreover, He said to me, “Son of man, take into your heart all My words which I will speak to you and listen closely. ¹¹Go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’”

¹²Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me, “Blessed be the glory of the LORD in His place.” ¹³And I heard the sound of the wings of the living beings touching one another and the sound of the wheels beside them, even a great rumbling sound. ¹⁴So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away; and I went embittered in the rage of my spirit, and the hand of the LORD was strong on me. ¹⁵Then I came to the exiles who lived beside the river Chebar at Tel-abib, and I sat there seven

[Read 3:4-11]

Q: What is the prophet's first and foremost duty?

A: “Speak with My words”. (v.4) He is committed first and foremost to speaking God's Word.

Q: Why do you suppose God states the obvious, that in sending Ezekiel to his own people Israel that there won't be any language barrier?

A: It's actually a kind of way of stating that Ezekiel will, in fact, experience the most frustrating of all language barriers in that they will be largely unresponsive to anything he says because “Israel will be not willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me”.

“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.”

John 15:20-21

Q: In God's references to hardness in v.8-9, is He telling Ezekiel to be insensitive, uncaring, even unloving?

A: Ezekiel's name literally means “strengthened by God”. He is to be unwavering to God's truth in the face of rebelliousness. How “sensitive”, “caring”, or “loving” can someone be if they don't hold fast to the Truth which others are rejecting and thus leading them to hell? It should be noted that this is the most prized quality which Moses articulated in his blessing of the Levites. Ezekiel is actually being the quintessential priest by embracing these qualities.

*Who said of his father and his mother,
'I did not consider them';
And he did not acknowledge his brothers,
Nor did he regard his own sons,
For they observed Your word,
And kept Your covenant.*

Deuteronomy 33:9

Point: *God's prophets exhibit the ultimate commitment to the Truth because they are sent to a people whose number one problem is willful and conscious rejection of the Truth. It's only when they finally return to the Truth that everything else will follow spiritually.*

[Read 3:12-15]

Q: Yes, the imagery is magnificent, but what is the practical application being taught in v.12-13 where prophets are concerned?

A: Having first been prepared and filled with His Word – that is, being given the right tools – they are led by the Spirit – that is, given the right place and time. God does what is necessary to bring His Word in power at the right place and time, even though it might not appear so by purely human standards. This is the same thing that happened to Philip in Acts. (Acts 8:39)

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days where they were living, causing consternation among them.

Q: Why should we not be surprised at Ezekiel's revelation that "I went embittered in the rage of my spirit"? Shouldn't he have had a much more positive demeanor?

A: Look what happened to Jeremiah just after he ate God's Word, after the "sweet as honey" effect of initially receiving God's Word:

*I did not sit in the circle of merry-makers,
Nor did I exult.
Because of Your hand upon me I sat alone,
For You filled me with indignation.
Jeremiah 15:17*

Look what happened to John just after **HE** ate God's Word:

*So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.
Revelation 10:9-10*

Point: *The doing and the carrying out of God's Word is a much different matter than the learning and discovering. Carrying out God's Word, when one is completely responsible for the consequences, is a different task than learning about it. This is especially true where prophecy is concerned when the joyful emotions of having something revealed wears off when faced with the reality of what is about to happen to those who will not listen. True prophets care very deeply about how God's Word will be received and although they stand undeterred in the Truth, nonetheless suffer in their empathy for the lost.*

Q: What is special about "the exiles who lived beside the river Chebar at Tel-abib?"

A: Ezekiel was taken into captivity with Israelites from the southern kingdom of Judah. These were Israelites from the northern kingdom of Israel who were originally taken captive a hundred or more years earlier by the then-king of Assyria and were now captives in the Babylonian Empire. By taking him here, Ezekiel was now providing God's Word to **ALL** of Israel in exile, not just a portion.

Q: With all that Ezekiel has gone through and the manner in which he's been prepared to this point, did you expect that the very first thing he'd do is sit silently for 7 days? What is going on?

- First, such a period was an indication of very great mourning. It's the same thing that Job's friends did when they first came to him. (Job 2:13) It speaks powerfully of Ezekiel's personal feelings for these people, mourning their anticipated rejection of God's Word.
- Second, it's a powerful insight into the way a prophet works in that it's not enough to be properly committed and properly equipped, but must also be in the right place and time to carry out their ministry. They are an example of submitting **EVERYTHING** to God's control.

Point: *True prophets speak, appear, and work only when and where God designates. There is no biblical precedent for them holding rallies or assemblies or weekly television shows. If not directed by God to speak, they will wait for **HIS** time and place.*

¹⁶At the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ¹⁷“Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. ¹⁸When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. ¹⁹Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself.

²⁰“Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. ²¹However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself.”

²²The hand of the LORD was on me there, and He said to me, “Get up, go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you.”

²³So I got up and went out to the plain; and behold, the glory of the LORD was standing there, like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face.

²⁴The Spirit then entered me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me and said to me, “Go, shut yourself up in your house. ²⁵As for you, son of man, they will put ropes on you and bind you with them so that you cannot go out among them. ²⁶Moreover, I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be mute and cannot be a man who rebukes them, for they are a rebellious house. ²⁷But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you will say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’ He who hears, let him hear; and he

[Read 3:16-21]

Q: What is unusual in Ezekiel’s appointment as a watchman?

A: He’s the only prophet God specifically appointed as a watchman.

Q: “Watchman” has been used in a generic sense for others in the Bible, but what is different about the roles and responsibilities being specifically assigned to Ezekiel?

A: The generic role of watchman has usually been assigned the task of watching for the coming of God’s judgment; Ezekiel is being assigned the task of observing and speaking out about the condition of their personal faithfulness. He is not limited to warning the wicked, but warning and affirming the righteous as well.

Point: *When you look at the whole of what God has spoken through the prophets, there is far more said concerning personal faithfulness than in making predictions of future events. Prophets aren’t allowed to just make predictions and leave; they are called to be a living example among those to whom they’re called, providing direction how to live properly at the time those predictions come about. A true prophet is not strictly a messenger, but a living example of the message.*

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

2 Timothy 4:2-4

“Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Acts 20:31

[Read 3:22-27]

Point: *Here we essentially have a summary of all that’s involved in Ezekiel’s calling and ministry as an example of the true prophet:*

1. *Humbled in the presence of God. (v.22-23)*
2. *Established and empowered by the Spirit. (v.24)*
3. *Goes only where God directs and when. (v.24)*
4. *Will meet great resistance to his ministry by those he’s sent to. (v.25)*
5. *Speaks only when directed by God, sticking strictly to God’s Word. (v.26-27)*
6. *Any results of his ministry are actually a mirror of the spiritual condition of those to whom he is sent. (v.27)*

“Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.”

Revelation 22:11

who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.

Overall Application

- *Discuss the truth of this statement: People who desire a special word from the Lord are often not wholly obedient or listening to the Word He's already given."*
- *How do those who today claim the title "prophet" compare to what you've learned about Ezekiel? What are the things that immediately indicate something may be false about their claim?*
- *If the role of a prophet is like that of an evangelist to God's people, how would you expect to see the spirit of prophecy at work in the church today? Who is carrying out the work of reaching the backslidden and confirming the path of the righteous?*
- *Can you find an instance where a prophet was sent by God **EXCEPT** in times of extreme, spiritual trouble? How does this speak of the greater need for personal faithfulness than the appearance of a true prophet of God?*

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