Ezekiel 3

The Watchman: Eat the Word, Then Warn

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."
Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

God's man has to eat the Word before he can speak it, and he needs a face harder than the people he is sent to. His job is to be a watchman: warn the wicked, warn the righteous, and leave the response with them — but if he stays silent, their blood is on his hands. And even the watchman speaks only when God opens his mouth.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

EZEKIEL 3 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold God — His character & actions | Green Command / instruction | ⇄ Sky Key repeated word
⚠ Rose Sin / warning | ★ Violet Promise / blessing | Amber Time / place / contrast

[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.

[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.

[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.

[14] So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and ⚠ I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but ▲ the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.

[15] Then I came to them of the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

[16] And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

[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.

[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.

[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.

20 Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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:

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.

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.

Marked in the text

- **v1** eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel
- **v3** it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness
- **v4** speak with my words unto them
- **v7** the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me
- **v7** impudent
- **v8** I have made thy face strong against their faces
- **v9** As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead
- **v9** fear them not
- **v10** receive in thine heart
- **v12** Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place
- **v14** I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit
- **v14** the hand of the LORD was strong upon me
- **v15** I sat where they sat
- **v15** seven days
- **v17** I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel
- **v17** warn *(every occurrence)*
- **v18** Thou shalt surely die
- **v18** his blood will I require at thine hand
- **v19** thou hast delivered thy soul
- **v20** When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness
- **v21** he shall surely live, because he is warned
- **v23** the glory of the LORD stood there
- **v26** I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth
- **v27** I will open thy mouth
- **v27** He that heareth, let him hear

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 3:7 (KJV)

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 .

Setting

The call that began in chapter 1 continues, still about 593 BC among the exiles in Babylon. Ezekiel eats the scroll handed to him in 2:9–10, is carried by the Spirit to the exile settlement at Tel-abib on the river Chebar, and sits there stunned for seven days (v15). "At the end of seven days" (v16) God gives him a second charge: he is to be a watchman. The chapter closes with a third meeting with the glory on the plain (vv22–23) and strange restrictions on his movement and speech (vv24–27).

Structure

- vv1–3 — **eat the scroll:** "eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel" (v1). He eats it, "and it was sweet as honey in my mouth" (v3).
- vv4–11 — **sent to his own people:** "go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them" (v4). He is "not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language" (v5) — "yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me" (v7). They are "stubborn and obstinate" (v7), so God says, "I have made your face as hard as their faces" (v8). "Like emery harder than flint I have made your forehead" (v9). "Do not be afraid of them or be dismayed before them" (v9). First he must "take into your heart all My words which I will speak to you and listen closely" (v10).
- vv12–15 — **lifted and set down:** a great rumbling voice: "Blessed be the glory of the LORD in His place" (v12). Ezekiel goes "embittered in the rage of my spirit, and the hand of the LORD was strong on me" (v14). He comes to "the exiles who lived beside the river Chebar at Tel-abib" (v15) and sits "seven days where they were living, causing consternation among them" (v15).
- vv16–21 — **the watchman:** "I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel" (v17) — hear a word "and warn them from Me" (v17). If God says to the wicked, "You will surely die" (v18), and Ezekiel doesn't warn him, "his blood I will require at your hand" (vv18, 20). If he warns and the man won't turn, "you have delivered yourself" (v19). If a righteous man turns to iniquity and "I place an obstacle before him" (v20), he dies; if he is warned and doesn't sin, "he shall surely live because he took warning" (v21).
- vv22–27 — **glory on the plain, then silence:** "the glory of the LORD was standing there" (v23), and again "I fell on my face" (v23). The Spirit stands him up: "Go, shut yourself up in your house" (v24). "They will put ropes on you and bind you with them" (v25). "I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be mute" (v26). "But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth" (v27). "He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house" (v27).

Repeated words

son of man (vv1, 3, 4, 10, 17, 25); house of Israel (vv1, 4, 5, 7, 17); warn / warning (vv17, 18, 19, 20, 21); wicked (vv18, 19); righteous (vv20, 21); die (vv18, 19, 20); rebellious house (vv9, 26, 27); My words (vv4, 10); mouth (vv2, 3, 17, 26, 27).

Contrasts

foreigners who would listen (v6) ⟷ Israel who will not (v7). Their hard faces (v7) ⟷ Ezekiel's harder forehead (vv8–9). A scroll of woe (2:10) ⟷ sweet as honey in his mouth (v3). Ezekiel's bitterness (v14) ⟷ the hand of the LORD strong on him (v14). The wicked warned and saved (v19) ⟷ the righteous unwarned and fallen (v20). A watchman's open mouth (v17) ⟷ a tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth (v26). "He who hears" ⟷ "he who refuses" (v27).

Chapter theme (my words)

God's man has to eat the Word before he can speak it, and he needs a face harder than the people he is sent to. His job is to be a watchman: warn the wicked, warn the righteous, and leave the response with them — but if he stays silent, their blood is on his hands. And even the watchman speaks only when God opens his mouth.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 3:9 (KJV)

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.

Eating the Word (vv1–3)

Guzik takes the eating as part of the vision, yet a real experience; the point is that God's message had to get all the way inside Ezekiel before it came out. Meyer, in Guzik: "It is possible to acquire an intellectual knowledge of the truth, while the heart is entirely unaffected." The surprise is the taste. A scroll of "lamentations, mourning and woe" (2:10) was sweet as honey, because it was God's will (Ps 119:103; Jer 15:16). Spurgeon, in Guzik: "If the word of God be not very sweet to me, have I an appetite?" John has the same experience — sweet in the mouth, bitter in the stomach (Rev 10:9–10).

Harder than they are (vv4–9)

A foreign nation, Guzik notes, might have listened — as Nineveh did for Jonah. Israel would not, because their quarrel was with God, not with the messenger (v7). Wright, in Guzik, calls v7 "one of the most dangerous verses in Scripture," because it can be used to blame hearers for our own poor delivery. God's answer to a hard people is a hard prophet. "Emery" (*shamir*) was the hardest stone known — harder than flint. Spurgeon, in Guzik: "Make your face like adamant if their hearts are like adamant." Fittingly, Ezekiel's name means "God strengthens."

Take it to heart first (vv10–11)

Before Ezekiel speaks to the exiles, he must "take into your heart all My words" (v10). Then he goes to his own people — "the exiles," his fellow captives — and speaks "whether they listen or not" (v11; compare 2:5, 7).

Bitter, but held (vv12–15)

The praise of v12 is heard over the roar of the wings and wheels from chapter 1. Then the Spirit carries Ezekiel off, and he goes "embittered in the rage of my spirit" (v14). Guzik lists possible reasons — his exile, the weight of the call, Israel's sin — and quotes Taylor that the Hebrew points to anger as the main emotion. Yet "the hand of the LORD was strong on me" (v14). At Tel-abib he sits seven days, stunned and silent among the exiles (v15). Taylor, in Guzik, notes that seven days was the period for consecrating a priest (Lev 8:33). Smith, in Guzik: "Those days of silence changed his attitude about his mission."

The watchman (vv16–21)

A watchman stood on the city wall and sounded the alarm when he saw an enemy coming (2 Sam 18:24–27; Ezek 33:1–6). Ezekiel is that man for Israel — but the warning comes "from Me" (v17), not from his own opinions. Guzik stresses that a watchman's work is faithful proclamation of God's word, not fault-finding. Four cases follow: the wicked, warned or not; the righteous who turns, warned or not. If Ezekiel is silent, "his blood I will require at your hand" (v18). Morgan, in Guzik: "If the wicked die in wickedness for lack of the prophetic word, the prophet is guilty of his blood." If he speaks and is ignored, he has "delivered" himself (v19). Paul applies the same principle: "I am innocent of the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26–27).

The righteous who turns (vv20–21)

Christians read this differently. Some (Arminian) see a real believer who falls away and is lost. Others (Reformed) see a person with outward righteousness who proves never to have been truly converted, or read it as covenant life and death in the land rather than eternal destiny. Guzik leans to the third reading: following Alexander, he takes "life" and "death" here as "physical, not eternal" — premature death under God's judgment — and does not use the passage to settle the eternal-security debate. On "I place an obstacle" (v20), Taylor, in Guzik: "it does not here indicate that God deliberately sets out to trip up the righteous." God tests; He doesn't entrap. Guzik's sober note: "One sin or a short season of sin can easily wipe out an otherwise good reputation."

Glory again, then silence (vv22–27)

On the plain, the same glory he saw by the Chebar appears, and down he goes again (v23). Wright, in Guzik, cites a wise man: "we should take ten looks at Christ to one at ourselves." Then come restrictions: shut in his house, bound with ropes, mute except when God speaks through him. Interpreters differ — a picture of how Israel would treat him (Trapp), of Israel's coming helplessness (Vawter and Hoppe), of God restraining His prophet until the right time (Wright, Taylor), or of God's silence toward a people who won't listen (Clarke). Guzik suggests a temporary muteness that pictured God's silence. It was lifted when news of Jerusalem's fall arrived (24:27; 33:21–22). "He who hears, let him hear" (v27) is the root of Jesus' own refrain (Matt 11:15; Rev 2:7).

Word study (Hebrew)

- **eat — *ʾakal* (H398):** to eat, consume, devour.
- **honey — *debash* (H1706):** honey.
- **sweet — *mathoq* (H4966):** sweet, pleasant.
- **forehead — *metsach* (H4696):** the brow, forehead.
- **emery — *shamir* (H8068):** a very hard stone; adamant, diamond.
- **flint — *tsor* (H6864):** flint, a hard sharp stone.
- **embittered — *mar* (H4751):** bitter, bitterness.
- **rage — *chemah* (H2534):** heat, anger, wrath.
- **Tel-abib — *Tel ʾAbib* (H8512):** "mound of the flood" or "hill of grain," an exile settlement on the Chebar.
- **consternation — *shamem* (H8074):** to be appalled, stunned, desolate.
- **watchman — *tsaphah* (H6822):** to look out, keep watch.
- **warn — *zahar* (H2094):** to admonish, warn, enlighten.
- **wicked — *rashaʿ* (H7563):** wicked, guilty.
- **iniquity — *ʿavon* (H5771):** iniquity, guilt, punishment for sin.
- **righteous — *tsaddiq* (H6662):** just, righteous.
- **obstacle — *mikshol* (H4383):** a stumbling block.
- **mute — *ʾalam* (H481):** to be bound, be dumb, speechless.

Cross-references

2 Sam 18:24–27; Ps 19:10; Ps 119:103; Isa 50:7; Isa 62:6; Jer 1:18; Jer 6:17; Jer 15:16; Jer 20:9; Ezek 18:24–26; Ezek 24:27; Ezek 33:1–9, 21–22; Jonah 3:5; Matt 11:15; Luke 1:20; Acts 20:26–27; 1 Cor 9:16; 2 Cor 4:2; Heb 13:17; James 5:19–20; Rev 2:7; Rev 10:9–10.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 3:27 (KJV)

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.

Command to obey — "warn them from Me."

God made Ezekiel a watchman (v17), and every believer who loves someone in danger has a piece of that job. When a man I disciple is drifting toward the old crowd, the old bottle or the old lie, love doesn't stay quiet. I'll speak plainly, with God's words, and leave the response to him and to God.

Sin to confess — a silent watchman

I've seen danger coming in someone's life and said nothing — to keep the peace, to avoid looking judgmental, or because I was tired. God says that silence is not neutral (v18). I confess the times I kept my mouth shut when love required me to speak.

Warning to heed — the righteous can turn

"when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness" (v20) — years of faithfulness don't make me immune. Guzik's warning stings: one season of sin can wipe out a good name. Every man in recovery knows that long clean time doesn't mean you can stop watching. Neither can I.

Promise to trust — "the hand of the LORD was strong on me."

Ezekiel went bitter and angry, but God's hand held him (v14). For the man coming out of prison, angry at the system, his family or himself: your feelings don't cancel God's grip. He can carry you to Tel-abib, sit you down among hurting people, and use your silence to change you.

Example to follow — sitting where they sat

Before Ezekiel said a word, he sat seven days among the exiles (v15). I want to earn the right to speak by first sitting with men in their pain — in visiting rooms, recovery meetings and kitchens — before I start preaching at them.

Worship

"Blessed be the glory of the LORD in His place" (v12). His Word is sweet as honey. He makes weak men hard as flint, He opens and shuts mouths, and His hand is strong on His servants even when they are bitter.

Prayer

Lord, let Your Word go all the way down into me and taste sweet even when it is hard. Make my face firm against fear. Make me a faithful watchman for the men You've given me — never silent when love must speak, never speaking what You haven't said. Keep me from turning away, and hold me with Your strong hand. Amen.