Ezekiel 33

The Watchman on the Wall: Turn and Live

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 sets a watchman on the wall and makes him responsible to sound the alarm — and makes every hearer responsible to respond. To men who feel they are rotting away in their sins, God swears by His own life that He takes no pleasure in their death: turn and live. Then the city falls, the prophet's mouth opens, and God exposes two kinds of people who still don't get it — the ones claiming promises while living in sin, and the ones who love to hear sermons but never obey them.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

EZEKIEL 33 (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 Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

2 Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their ⇄ watchman:

3 If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, Green he blow the trumpet, and warn the people;

4 Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, ⚠ his blood shall be upon his own head.

5 He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But ★ he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul.

6 But if the ⇄ watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the ⇄ watchman's hand.

7 So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a ⇄ watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and Green warn them from me.

8 When I say unto the wicked, ⚠ O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

9 Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

10 Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, ◷ how should we then live?

11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ▲ I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: Green turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for ⚠ why will ye die, O house of Israel?

12 Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth.

13 When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; ⚠ if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.

14 Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right;

15 If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.

16 ★ None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live.

17 Yet the children of thy people say, ⚠ The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal.

18 When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby.

19 But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.

20 Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, ▲ I will judge you every one after his ways.

21 And it came to pass ◷ in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying, ◷ The city is smitten.

22 Now the hand of the LORD was upon me in the evening, afore he that was escaped came; and had opened my mouth, until he came to me in the morning; and ▲ my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb.

23 Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

24 Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, ⚠ Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance.

25 Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and ⇄ shall ye possess the land?

26 Ye stand upon your sword, ye work abomination, and ye defile every one his neighbour's wife: and ⇄ shall ye possess the land?

27 Say thou thus unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; As I live, surely they that are in the wastes shall fall by the sword, and him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they that be in the forts and in the caves shall die of the pestilence.

28 For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, that none shall pass through.

29 ▲ Then shall they know that I am the LORD, when I have laid the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed.

30 Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD.

31 And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and ⚠ they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.

32 And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.

33 And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that ◷ a prophet hath been among them.

Marked in the text

- **v2** ⇄ watchman *(every occurrence)*
- **v3** ▮▮ he blow the trumpet, and warn the people
- **v4** ⚠ his blood shall be upon his own head
- **v5** ★ he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul
- **v6** ⚠ his blood will I require at the watchman's hand
- **v7** ▲ I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel

- **v7** warn them from me
- **v8** O wicked man, thou shalt surely die
- **v10** how should we then live
- **v11** I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked
- **v11** turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways
- **v11** why will ye die, O house of Israel
- **v13** if he trust to his own righteousness
- **v16** None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him
- **v17** The way of the Lord is not equal
- **v20** I will judge you every one after his ways
- **v21** in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month
- **v21** The city is smitten
- **v22** my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb
- **v24** Abraham was one, and he inherited the land
- **v25** shall ye possess the land *(every occurrence)*
- **v29** Then shall they know that I am the LORD
- **v31** they hear thy words, but they will not do them
- **v33** a prophet hath been among them

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 33:11 (KJV)

11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Setting

Chapter 33 is the hinge of Ezekiel. Chapters 1–24 warned Jerusalem; chapters 25–32 judged the nations; now the news arrives: "Now in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month, the refugees from Jerusalem came to me, saying, 'The city has been taken'" (v21). From here (chs 33–48) Ezekiel's message turns toward restoration. Before the news comes, God renews Ezekiel's call as watchman (compare 3:16–21) and ends the muteness He imposed back in 3:26–27 and 24:27.

Structure

- vv1–6 — **the watchman's duty:** "If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman" (v2), "and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people" (v3), whoever ignores it — "his blood will be on his own head" (v4). "But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life" (v5). If the watchman stays silent, "his blood I will require from the watchman's hand" (v6).
- vv7–9 — **Ezekiel the watchman:** "Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me" (v7). "O wicked man, you will surely die" (v8). "But you have delivered your life" (v9).
- vv10–11 — **"how then can we survive?":** the exiles say, "Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?" (v10). God answers with an

oath — "As I live!" — and a plea: "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?" (v11).

- vv12–20 — **turning either way:** "The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression" (v12). If a wicked man "turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness" (v14), "None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him" (v16). The people say, "The way of the Lord is not right" (vv17, 20). God: "I will judge each of you according to his ways" (v20).
- vv21–22 — **"The city has been taken":** "the hand of the LORD had been upon me in the evening," and "my mouth was opened and I was no longer speechless" (v22).
- vv23–29 — **the survivors' false claim:** those in the ruins say, "Abraham was only one, yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession" (v24). God lists their sins and asks twice, "Should you then possess the land?" (vv25, 26). Sword, beasts and pestilence will reach them (v27); "the pride of her power will cease" (v28).
- vv30–33 — **hearers, not doers:** the exiles say, "Come now and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD" (v30). They "hear your words, but they do not do them" (v31). "You are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument" (v32). "So when it comes to pass — as surely it will — then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst" (v33).

Repeated words

watchman (vv2, 6, 7); sword (vv2, 3, 4, 6, 26, 27); trumpet (vv3, 4, 5, 6); warn / warns / warned / warning (vv3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9); blood (vv4, 5, 6, 8, 25); wicked (vv8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 19); turn / turns (vv9, 11, 12, 14, 18, 19); live — survive (vv11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19); die (vv8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 27); righteousness (vv12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19); "The way of the Lord is not right" (vv17, 20); "Should you then possess the land?" (vv25, 26); desolation and a waste (vv28, 29).

Contrasts

the watchman who warns (v3) ⟷ the watchman who stays silent (v6). The righteous who turns to sin (v18) ⟷ the wicked who turns to righteousness (v19). "Rotting away in them" (v10) ⟷ "turn from his way and live" (v11). "Abraham was only one" (v24) ⟷ "we who are many" — yet living nothing like Abraham (vv25–26). A mouth shut for years (v22) ⟷ a mouth opened. Hearing (v31) ⟷ doing.

Chapter theme (my words)

God sets a watchman on the wall and makes him responsible to sound the alarm — and makes every hearer responsible to respond. To men who feel they are rotting away in their sins, God swears by His own life that He takes no pleasure in their death: turn and live. Then the city falls, the prophet's mouth opens, and God exposes two kinds of people who still don't get it — the ones claiming promises while living in sin, and the ones who love to hear sermons but never obey them.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 33:7 (KJV)

7 So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

The watchman on the wall (vv1–6)

In the ancient world a city's safety depended on the man posted on the wall. When he saw an army coming, he blew the *shophar* (ram's-horn trumpet). If people heard and ignored it, their death was their own fault — "his blood will be on his own head" (v4). If the watchman saw and stayed silent, God would hold him responsible (v6). Guzik notes this "was a great assurance to Ezekiel and Jeremiah because they warned many but few listened." He also warns modern "watchmen" against distorting the calling by focusing on "the examination of supposed error more than the proclamation of God's truth."

Ezekiel's commission renewed (vv7–9)

This repeats 3:17–21 almost word for word. Ezekiel's message was to come "from My mouth" (v7) — not from political analysis. Guzik calls "O wicked man, you will surely die" the main message of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. The watchman is accountable for faithfulness, not results: if he warns and they refuse, "you have delivered your life" (v9). Paul echoes this at Ephesus: "I am innocent of the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26).

God's heart (vv10–11)

Jerusalem's fall is about to be confirmed, and the exiles despair: "we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?" (v10). Guzik hears an accusation of unfairness in the question. God's answer is an oath — "As I live!" — and a plea: "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live" (v11; compare 18:23, 32). Guzik notes the statement is made first about judgment in this life on Judah and Jerusalem, but because it is rooted in God's character, "it applies to God's eternal judgments" too (compare 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9).

The changed life (vv12–20)

The exiles were fatalists: we're stuck with our past. God says no. A man's past righteousness won't protect him if he turns to sin, and a man's past wickedness won't condemn him if he truly turns (vv12–16). The repentant man must show it — restore the pledge, pay back what he stole, walk in God's statutes (v15) — and then "None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him" (v16). Guzik stresses that God's pronouncements of life or death are not irreversible.

Does this teach that salvation can be lost?

Christians read vv12–20 in different ways. Many take "live" and "die" here mainly as physical life and death under the coming judgment on Judah. Some (often Arminian) see a warning that a believer can turn away and perish. Others (often Reformed) note v13's man "so trusts in his righteousness that he

commits iniquity" — trusting his own record, not God — and hold that true faith perseveres, so a turning away shows faith was never real (1 John 2:19). Guzik frames the passage around fatalism and God's fairness rather than eternal security, and applies the principle through James 2:14–17: real faith is proven by works.

"The way of the Lord is not right" (vv17–20)

The people accuse God of unfairness. God turns it back: "it is their own way that is not right" (v17). He judges "each of you according to his ways" (v20) — individually, by the direction of a man's life now.

The news and the opened mouth (vv21–22)

"The city has been taken." Guzik notes this came about seven years after Ezekiel's first prophecies (1:2–3). The date raises a question: by the usual reckoning Jerusalem fell in the fourth month of the eleventh year (Jer 39:2; 52:5–6), which would make this report a year and a half late. Some explain it by different ways of counting the years (placing the fall in 586 BC, so the news took about five months — compare Ezra's four-month journey, Ezra 7:9); a few Hebrew and Greek manuscripts read "eleventh year." Either way, the evening before the refugee arrived, God opened Ezekiel's mouth, fulfilling 24:25–27. The man who had been silent for judgment now speaks for restoration.

The survivors' false claim (vv23–29)

Back in Judah, the people left in the ruins reasoned: if one man, Abraham, got the land, surely we many will keep it (v24). Guzik points to Jeremiah 40–44 for who these survivors were. But they ate meat with blood in it, worshiped idols, shed blood, relied on the sword, committed abominations and adultery (vv25–26). "Should you then possess the land?" Guzik: they had not escaped judgment, only delayed it. God had promised the land's future to the exiles who would return, not to those who stayed and kept sinning (11:14–17). Abraham's promise never belonged to people who would not walk in Abraham's faith (John 8:39).

Hearers, not doers (vv30–33)

Ezekiel had become popular. People talked about him by the walls and in doorways and came to "hear what the message is" (v30). But "they hear your words, but they do not do them" (v31); "their heart goes after their gain." He was like "a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice" (v32) — good entertainment. Guzik: when the prophecies came true, they would know "that a prophet has been in their midst" (v33) — he was never just an inspirational speaker.

Word study (Hebrew)

- **watchman — *tsophe* (H6822):** a lookout, sentinel; one who watches closely.
- **trumpet — *shophar* (H7782):** a ram's-horn trumpet used for alarms.
- **warn — *zahar* (H2094):** to admonish, enlighten, warn.
- **blood — *dam* (H1818):** blood; bloodguilt.
- **require — *baqash* (H1245):** to seek, demand, hold accountable.
- **wicked — *rasha* (H7563):** guilty, wicked, ungodly.
- **pleasure — *chaphets* (H2654):** to delight in, take pleasure.
- **turn — *shub* (H7725):** to turn back, return, repent.
- **righteousness — *tsedaqah* (H6666):** right living, justice.

- **not right — *takan* (H8505):** to weigh, measure; "not right" = not measuring up.
- **refugees — *palit* (H6412):** an escapee, fugitive.
- **speechless — *alam* (H481):** to be bound, mute.
- **possession — *morashah* (H4181):** an inheritance, possession.
- **abominations — *toebah* (H8441):** a detestable thing, especially idolatry.
- **lustful desires — *agabim* (H5690):** passionate desire, lust.
- **gain — *betsa* (H1215):** profit, unjust gain.

Cross-references

Gen 9:4; Isa 21:6–12; Isa 55:7; Jer 6:17; Jer 39:1–9; Jer 40–44; Ezek 3:16–27; Ezek 18:21–32; Ezek 24:25–27; Hos 9:8; Matt 3:9; Matt 7:24–27; Luke 6:46; John 8:39; Acts 20:26–27; 1 Tim 2:4; Heb 13:17; Jas 1:22–25; Jas 2:14–17; 2 Pet 3:9.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 33:3 (KJV)

3 If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people;

Command to obey — "give them warning from Me."

God made Ezekiel a watchman (v7), and every believer who loves people carries a piece of that wall. When I see the sword coming for a man — relapse, violence, a return to the old crew — I have to blow the trumpet, lovingly and plainly. My job is faithfulness; his response is his (v9).

Sin to confess — hearing without doing

"They hear your words, but they do not do them" (v31). I write about the Word, build tools for studying it, and teach it. That makes this my danger: enjoying the song and not obeying it. I confess the places where I've heard God clearly and haven't moved. "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (Jas 1:22).

Warning to heed — claiming promises while living in sin

The survivors quoted Abraham while eating blood and worshiping idols (vv24–26). Some men I meet quote "God's got me" or "once saved, always saved" while living however they want. God's promises are real, but they are not a shield for rebellion. "Should you then possess the land?"

Promise to trust — "turn and live."

For the man who says, "I'm rotting away in my sins — how can I survive?" (v10), God swears by His own life: "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live" (v11). The man in prison, the man fresh out, the man on his fourth try at sobriety — his past does

not have the final word. When he turns, "None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him" (v16). In Christ that promise has a cross under it (1 John 1:9).

Example to follow — Ezekiel's silence and speech

Ezekiel kept quiet when God said be quiet and spoke when God opened his mouth (v22). He kept preaching to people who treated him as entertainment. I want that kind of faithfulness — speaking only what God gives, and still speaking when it seems no one is really listening.

Worship

The Lord GOD lives, and He swears by His own life that He wants sinners to live. His ways are right even when mine are not. He keeps His word in judgment and in mercy, and every word He speaks comes to pass.

Prayer

Lord GOD, thank You that You take no pleasure in the death of the wicked — including me. Make me a faithful watchman for the men You put on my wall: give me courage to warn and love enough to stay. Keep me from being only a hearer. And for every man who thinks he is rotting away in his sins, let him hear You say, "Turn back, turn back" — and live. Amen.