

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

EZEKIEL 2-3

It took place on July 16, 1945 at the Alamogordo Air Base in the deserts of New Mexico. It was the world's first detonation of a atomic bomb. The explosion produced the now famous mushroom cloud and fireball that covered an area approximately four square miles.

The blast was the equivalent of 20 kilotons of TNT.

The temperature at the site, in the moment after the blast, was three times hotter than the sun. The bomb vaporized the steel tower on which it was mounted.

Sixteen years later, the desert floor was still emitting radioactivity... Today, Alamogordo Air Base is a state park. It's a memorial to the men and technology that launched America, and the world, into the nuclear age.

But what struck me was the project's codename.

It's nickname was "[The Gadget.](#)" But it's codename was coined by the lead physicist on the project, J. Robert Oppenheimer. The codename was "[Trinity.](#)"

It's ironic, he named a powerful fireball after God.

Oppenheimer must've read Ezekiel 1. Long before the atomic era, the Hebrew prophet, had a vision of an enormous fireball. It was God's throne-chariot.

It reminds us of Hebrews 12:29, "[Our God is a consuming fire.](#)" Ezekiel saw a heavenly brushfire coming out of the north - from the direction of heaven.

A whirlwind was blowing - a fire was burning. It was a blazing inferno. And out of it came angels, cherubim. And beside the angels were wheels within wheels.

God's throne moved on angel's wings... When their wings stopped, it killed the engine... God's throne is a chariot that cruises the heavens on angel-power.

At the time the Jews were being punished for their rebellion. They'd been conquered by the Babylonians and taken to the foreign land of Babel to live in exile.

It was a dark day when Ezekiel saw this brilliant light.

He saw God's glory and rather than *vaporize* him, it *sanitized* him, and *tenderized* him, and prepared him to be a prophet. In Chapter 1 Ezekiel sees a **vision of God**. Now in Chapter 2 he hears the **voice of God**.

Verse 1, “**And He** (that is, God) **said to me**, “**Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you.**” Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me.”

His vision of God's glory had humbled Ezekiel. In 1:28 he fell on his face before the Lord. But now the Holy Spirit picks him up, sobers him, strengthens his knees, and begins to speak to him God's instructions.

Ironically, in charismatic circles today supposedly the Holy Spirit knocks a person to the ground; then they're raised to their feet by human hands. That's not what happens to Ezekiel... it's the other way around.

Here, a man falls to his face, and the Spirit lifts him up. It's when we humble ourselves before the Lord that the Holy Spirit gives us strength and raises us up.

Verse 3, “And He said to me: “Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.”

Here God calls the Jews “*a rebellious nation,*” but it's not the Hebrew word usually used for the nation Israel.

This is the word “goi” or “goyim” - which is “Gentile.”

It's God's way of saying His own people have acted like pagan Gentiles - “a nation who never knew Me” - not the privileged people God had made them to be.

“For they are impudent and stubborn children.” “Stiff-necked and hard-hearted” - they were stubborn kids.

Harry Randall Truman, 83 years old, lived in a cabin a mile from Mount St. Helens in Washington state. For weeks officials told him and his neighbors to evacuate.

Ole Harry was quoted as saying, “You're all acting like wimps. That mountain ain't going to hurt me...boy.”

In the end Harry was one of 57 people who died in the most destructive volcano blast in US history. Harry's body was covered by 800 degree liquid rock, and 1000 pound boulders. But it wasn't really the mountain that killed him... *Harry died of stubbornness.*

And the Jewish people were just as stubborn and stiff-necked as Harry Randall Truman. God sounded the alarm

through Jeremiah - the Babylonians would blow the top off their peace and quiet - but they refused to listen. They were sure God was wrong and they were right. They stiffened their neck. They hardened their heart. God's only choice was to break them...

Beware, God's cure for a stiff-neck and hard-heart is either our brokenness or humility. We can humble ourselves - **bow our head and bend our knees**. Or God will do it - **bend our neck and break our heart**.

But now in light of the Jews' stubbornness, God has a mission for Ezekiel, **"I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.'"**

He is going to need the Holy Spirit *to lift Him up and make Him strong*. Ezekiel is being assigned a tough job. He's being sent to minister to very difficult people.

But here's the good news... **"God doesn't always call the equipped, but He does equip the called."** If God calls you to a task, He'll give you power to perform it.

And Ezekiel will deliver *God's Word to God's people*.

God will give the prophet, *as He gives pastors today*, different messages at different times, but the godly man always speaks out, **"Thus says the Lord God."**

Ezekiel is to declare God's Word regardless of its reception, **"As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse - for they are a rebellious house - yet they will know that a prophet has been among them."**

We might wonder why God would waste such a skilled, and anointed, and courageous man like Ezekiel on a people who He knew may never listen to him?

It seems to us like an efficient use of manpower.

Why not send a less able spokesman to these people? If the Jews are going to reject his message anyway, *why waste your best and brightest on them?*

But God sees situations and passes out assignments differently than we would. He sends the less able spokesman to the soft-hearted people who are ready to repent and receive God's message of hope.

Remember, Jonah was a sorry witness. He ran from God's calling. Despised the people God sent him to reach. Gave a short message. And when they repented he sulked that he'd been responsible for their salvation.

God used Jonah *in spite of him*, not *because of him*.

But God takes a dedicated man, like Ezekiel, and deploys him to reach the rebellious. An eager audience doesn't require as godly a spokesman as much as a stubborn crowd. God wanted to insure that on the Day of Judgment no one could say, "He was unfair, or God didn't warn us." God sent Ezekiel to the Jews, so they'd have to admit, "*a prophet was among us.*"

This is not how we generally think, but realize even though your witness may not *bring about a person's salvation*, it may accomplish the even greater goal of *insuring God's vindication*. In the end your ministry might've been to silence the sinner, and glorify God.

Verse 6, “**And you, son of man...**” This is a familiar phrase in Ezekiel. It’s used 94 times, and was a way of emphasizing his humanity. He was *a servant of God, a spokesman for God*, but he was still *a son of man*.

And “**Son of man**” was the title the Gospel writers gave to Jesus. It’s used 89 times in four Gospels. And it’s used for the same purpose - to emphasize Jesus’ humanity. He was God, but He was also a Son of man.

God tells him, “**And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house.**” Briers are painful. Thorns are bothersome. Scorpions sting. And all the above is in Ezekiel’s future - if not literally, then metaphorically. But Ezekiel can’t back down!

He’ll be threatened by both *words* and *looks*. And having received a fair share of each I’m not sure which is worse. A word stings. But sometimes *a look can kill*.

I’ll never forget the lady who stared a hole in me the whole service. If looks could kill this gal would’ve been an assassin. I preached my way through her assault, only to find out later she gave her life to the Lord that morning. I was so glad I wasn’t “**dismayed by her look.**”

Ezekiel can’t be intimidated by *words* or *looks*!

Verse 7, “**You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious.**” God is instructing Ezekiel from the outset of his ministry not to

measure his success by tangible results. Don't *give up* or *get down* for lack of results.

Whether the Jews hear or reject, he is to be faithful!

When William Carey started to talk about going to India as a missionary, his dad pointed out his lack of academic training. But William responded, "I can plod."

Plodding through the muck and mire - picking up one foot and putting it in front of the other - then doing it again and again - is ministry's most vital qualification.

Endurance is the indispensable tool for a minister.

It's been said "A determined soul will do more with a rusty monkey-wrench than a loafer will accomplish with all the tools of a machine shop." *Determination and desire are more important than degrees and diplomas.*

A plodder will go farther than a prancer. We need pastors and church leaders to be determined souls.

Verse 8, "But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you."

Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it.

Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe."

To my knowledge, there's only one other scroll in Scripture written on the front and the back - that scroll appears in Revelation 5. It's sealed with seven seals.

That particular scroll is the title deed to the Universe.

And John discovers only one person is worthy to open that scroll, and break the seals, and take possession of the Universe - that person is Jesus!

But breaking the seals is painful. When each seal pops a judgment is poured out on the wicked world. Here, Ezekiel sees something similar - a scroll that has written on it "*lamentations, and mourning, and woe.*"

Chapter 3, "*Moreover He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll.*" It tasted a little papery.

If he'd put a little jelly on it, it would've been a *jelly scroll*. I'm sure he asked for some butter on his scroll.

Actually, the idea of eating the scroll was idiomatic. The phrase was a metaphor for digesting or applying it.

"And He said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you. So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness."

He liked God's Word. It was sweet to his taste. This is the key to understanding the Bible... It's been said, "*Man's knowledge must be understood to be loved, but God's knowledge must be loved to be understood.*"

When you love God and really want to know Him, that's when the Scripture begins to open up to you....

In Revelation 10 the Apostle John also ate the scroll. He said, “It was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter.”

It was sweet in his mouth, but bitter in his belly. As John considered God’s kingdom it excited him. *How sweet!* When God rules the world, life will taste sweet.

But when John began to digest the implications of God’s kingdom on the world around him, it left him with a bitter taste. There would be people he loved, who because of their sin and rebellion - without Christ they’ll burn in Hell. This gives John a real case of heartburn!

This is why Bible’s message can be described as “sweet and sour.” It **thrills us** to realize the blessings that are our’s in Christ. But it **chills us** to realize the judgments that are coming on those apart from Christ.

Also pay close attention to this concept of eating and digesting the Word of God. Remember what Jeremiah said (15:16), “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart...” Jeremiah had scarfed up the Scriptures.

The other day we took the grandkids to Five Guys, and I watched my grandsons do what their parents did. They licked the ketchup off the french fries, without eating the fries. And this is what a lot of people do with God’s Word. **They like the sweet, but not the meat!**

The Bible deserves more than a casual reading - a superficial treatment. We need to bite into it, chew it up, mull it over and over, savor it, digest it’s message!

Verse 4, “Then He said to me: “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.

For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand.

Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you.” You would assume if God had sent Ezekiel to a foreign land and a pagan people, rather than Israel - that would’ve been the harder assignment.

He would’ve bought Rosetta Stone and had to learn a language. But God sent Ezekiel to his own people.

Yet this turned out to be the tougher task. A foreign people, having spent years in spiritual darkness, would’ve been happy to hear and heed the message.

But the Jews had already heard it all! They’d heard it so often they were immune to the message. They thought they were okay since they were God’s people.

And the same is true for us. We think missionaries who leave the comfort and conveniences of America for a third world country have it hard. But the folks God sends them to reach are hungry for the Gospel.

While, you and I are called to the “savage” next door.

And the problem with many Southerners is that they’ve heard it all before. They think that because they made a nominal commitment in the past, they’re okay today. This couldn’t be further from the truth.

A missionary is not necessarily a person who crosses the ocean, but is willing to cross the street to share the Gospel. Do we love the “pagans” at home!

Verse 7, “But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted. Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. Like adamant stone (like granite), harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house.”

In essence, God tells Ezekiel he needs to be just as hard-headed as the Jews. I believe there is such a thing as *sanctified stubbornness*. Not all stubbornness is a sin or detrimental. The right stubbornness can be beneficial. It's good to be stubborn for what's right.

There's a biblical word you can translate “*sanctified stubbornness*.” We don't use it much any more, but it's a great word... “**steadfast**.” Be consistent. Be faithful.

Stubbornly hold on to what's right. Be steadfast!

Jesus told us all in John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation...” Expect it! If you live for Him you'll be an enemy of this world. You'll be resisted and rejected.

That means if you're going to live for God you can't be easily swayed. You need some godly stubbornness.

In 1905 the University of Bern in Germany turned down a PhD dissertation as irrelevant and fanciful. It was by a young

student named, *Albert Einstein*. *Einstein* had to learn early in life to *reject the rejection!*

In 1894 a teacher in Harrow, England wrote on a 16 year old's report card the comment, "a conspicuous lack of success." That student was named, Winston Churchill - who had to learn to *reject the rejection*.

If you're going to live the Christian life you also must learn to *reject the rejection*. Keep your eyes on God and don't be intimidated by looks and laughs of others.

Verse 10, "Moreover He said to me: "Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse." I like this wording. If God calls you to a task, then as he told Ezekiel, "*go, get to it.*"

"Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a great thunderous voice: "Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place!" I also heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, and a great thunderous noise." God's throne-chariot is revving up!

It's getting ready for lift off!

"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." Ezekiel was still troubled by the things he'd been told. He hadn't been given much hope that His people would repent.

Yet, *“the Lord was strong upon me.”* Inwardly, Ezekiel was struggling, but that didn’t mean God had not anointed him, and would use him in powerful ways.

This is often the case with me. We think we need to resolved every issue we struggle with before God will use us - *all our ambiguities resolved, all our questions answered, all our inconsistencies conquered. We don’t!*

Just because you have a bitter, sour taste for a time, doesn’t mean the hand of the Lord isn’t still upon you.

“Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.”

This whole encounter with God - both the vision, and now His voice - wiped out Ezekiel for a whole week.

He just sat down astonished for seven days! I’m sure he pondered what he’d seen and been told. He was taking it all in. *His life would never be the same!*

Verse 16, *“Now it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me...”* In Ezekiel’s day, urban life went on within walled cities. All the ancient cities were surrounded and protected by stone walls.

The walls served multiple purposes: they kept out wild animals and criminals - they protected against armies in times of war - they projected a city’s status and prosperity - they

even gave the inhabitants of the city a vantage point to see beyond their own borders.

Every city had watchmen posted on top of the walls.

It was from the towers and ramparts the watchman kept an eye out for danger. He was the city's lookout!

The watchman had visibility - and it was his **visibility that created a responsibility for the folks inside the wall.**

And if the watchman was faithful to sound a warning the moment he saw danger - even if the townspeople refused to hear it, or didn't believe it, or shined it on as an over-reaction - then the watchman had done his job.

The lookout wasn't held accountable for the people's reaction, only his responsibility to sound the alarm.

But if he became negligent - *if he fell down on the job and refused to keep an eye-out, or if he dozed off, or if he didn't bother to sound the trumpet* - and the city was attacked; then any bloodshed or loss of life would be his responsibility. The blood would be upon his hands.

The lookout would be accountable for the disaster.

Go to Jerusalem today and you'll notice Israeli soldiers stationed all along on top of the walls, keeping watch over the city... but they're not always so vigilant.

I've seen a few lookouts curled up with a newspaper, or dozing off while on guard... not everyone is a poster boy for readiness. It's a good thing nothing happened.

But this comes home to roost in the next few verses.

Verse 18, “When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.” Ezekiel was a spiritual watchman. He was God’s lookout.

And the same rules applied to him as to the guy who literally sat on the wall. The Prophet *knew God* and he *loved God*. If he saw danger and didn’t sound a warning, he was responsible for the consequences.

The people’s “*blood*” so-to-speak - the condemnation of their souls would be upon Ezekiel’s hands. Ezekiel was responsible for the outcome of their ignorance.

Verse 19, “Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.” Once the watchman sounds the warning, then he’s done his duty. His hands are now clean. It’s up to the recipient of the message to take it to heart.

As the old saying goes, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” We can preach and plead, but everyone’s salvation is his own decision.

Verse 20, “Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand.

Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul.” In other words, the watchman has a responsibility to *the wicked* and *the righteous* person.

It’s our duty to call the wicked man to come to Jesus.

It’s our duty to warn a righteous man who stumbles.

And the same principle applies... if the watchman is faithful to issue the warning, he saves the person in danger and his our own soul from judgment... but if he fails to speak the warning, he puts both himself and the people in peril. *His visibility created a responsibility!*

Of course, Ezekiel and Israel are not the only people in this passage. The principle God applied to Ezekiel, also applies to us, and the people within our walls.

Who are the folks who live within your walls? Or your sphere of influence? Certainly it includes your family, your friends, your neighbors, your co-workers, your church. God has given each of us a different sphere of influence. For some of us our walls are broader than for others of us, but no man is an island. We all rub shoulders with other people. And I’m responsible for the people over which I have a degree of influence.

Each of us has a certain circle of contacts and we’re responsible for the spiritual awareness of those people.

Understand the *visibility* we’ve been granted into the things of God - our knowledge of His Word - create for us a *responsibility*. *Visibility creates responsibility.*

You know the Lord. You know the Scriptures. God has entrusted truth to you. People may think you're *off the wall* - but God has put you *on the wall*. You have a vantage point others don't have. You're God's lookout!

And you have a job to do! If you don't tell them the truth, and they die and go to hell, God will hold you responsible for not communicating to them the Gospel.

Christians often say, "Well, I'm living the truth. I'm being a good example for Christ. People need to see my faith without me having to tell them." Hey, I agree we need to be a good example, *but that's not enough*.

A watchman on the wall who saw danger on the horizon would be negligent if he didn't sound the alarm.

He needed to do more than provide an example. He needed to speak out! He has to communicate...

It's true, you can't *talk it convincingly* if you don't *walk it consistently*. You've got to *walk it and talk it*.

But at some point if you don't speak out, you haven't fulfilled your responsibility as a watchman on the wall.

DL Moody once walked up to a man on the street, and asked him, "Sir, are you a Christian?" The man snapped back, "You need to mind your own business!"

Moody responded, "Sir, this is my business." And the spiritual state of others is our business as well!

And I believe the application here goes beyond just sharing the Gospel. It's not enough just to see people saved, we want

to see them grow! If I'm learning and growing as a Christian; then I need to share those truths to help the people under my influence mature!

There're dangers lurking outside the walls. Let's sound the alarm for the sake of the folks around us.

Verse 22, "Then the hand of the Lord was upon me there, and He said to me, "Arise, go out into the plain, and there I shall talk with you." So I arose and went out into the plain, and behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, like the glory which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face." Ezekiel sees in the plain, the same vision he saw by the river. God's throne-chariot revs up once more. He's confronted with God's glory, and he hits the deck... He falls prostrate on his face.

God's glory will appear to Ezekiel over and over throughout this book. He seemed to live in God's glory. And this should be the goal of every Christian as well.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul describes the Christian life as a journey "*from glory to glory.*" As we sense God's glory - as the Holy Spirit gives us glimpses into His glory - we're transformed into the image of our Lord.

Verse 24, "Then the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet..." The Spirit is always setting him on his feet.

This is the job of the Holy Spirit. How often has he picked us up when we were down? He helps us stand.

And he "spoke with me and said to me: "Go, shut yourself inside your house. And you, O son of man, surely they will put

ropes on you and bind you with them, so that you cannot go out among them.

I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and not be one to rebuke them, for they are a rebellious house.”

Throughout the OT one of the signs of God's judgment on a nation was the absence of a prophet - a lack of a prophetic voice. When God stopped talking to His people they knew they were in serious trouble.

Sometimes a parents' scolding is nothing compared to their silences. *Quiet can speak louder than shouts.*

God is going to send the Prophet Ezekiel among the people, and open his mouth to speak - but Ezekiel begins his ministry alone and silent... God *ties him up and makes him mute*. His tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth. *It's as if he's been eating peanut butter!*

And Ezekiel's silence will be a sign to the Jewish people that they're in serious trouble. *Where is God's prophet? How come we don't hear him speak?*

The ropes on Ezekiel and his tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth is just the first of scores of object lessons that Ezekiel will use to communicate to Israel.

Recall, Jesus spoke in parables. Well, Ezekiel seemed to live his life in parables. He was constantly told by God to act out a spiritual skit or object lesson.

Ezekiel 24:24 sums up his ministry - God says to the nation, Israel, “**Thus Ezekiel is a sign to you; according to all that he has done...**” God had spoken to the Jews by Jeremiah and

the prophets - *through conventional means* - yet the people rejected God's truths. Now He calls Ezekiel to speak by unconventional methods.

I like to call Ezekiel "[the spiritual stuntman of the Bible.](#)" As we'll see, God will call on Ezekiel do some wild, bizarre, strange things to convey his messages.

Verse 27, "But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house."

As we've noted we're accountable to deliver the message, but the response is not our responsibility.

In conclusion, let me ask you *to ask God* to show you what constitutes your walls? Who lies within your sphere of influence? *Have you spoken to them? Have you told them the truth about God and their sin?*

Perhaps God wants to expand your walls, and enlarge your circle... Maybe there's someone within your walls right now, who's very obvious, yet you've missed them... We're all Lookouts... His watchmen...

God laid all of China on the heart of Hudson Taylor... He laid the whole world on the heart of Billy Graham...

He's laid our community on my heart...

What has He laid on your heart? Your neighbor next door? The guys at the gym? The parents on your kid's baseball team? The people you work with everyday?

When God shows you who's within your walls; then as he said to Ezekiel, *“go, get to (it).”* Bow before His glory... He'll lift you up, and make you stand! Amen!