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# THE LOOKOUT

**AUGUST 2022**

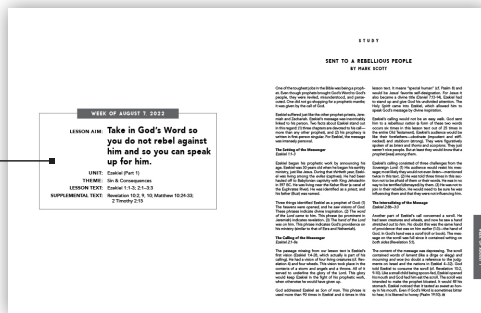
## Unit: Ezekiel (Part 1)

### Theme: Sin & Consequences

**Overview:** The major prophetic book of Ezekiel is the Judges of the exile. It is the Dark Ages of captivity for Israel. This prophet-priest had to announce that sin came with consequences. Idolatry caused a downward spiral for Israel. Students will learn that when God's people (and her leaders) are rebellious and sinful, God's glory will depart from them. Ezekiel proclaimed judgment to Judah and the nations around her (chapters 1-32), but he also proclaimed restoration (chapters 33-48). When God restores people, he always does so for the glory of his own name (a concept that appears 60 times in Ezekiel).

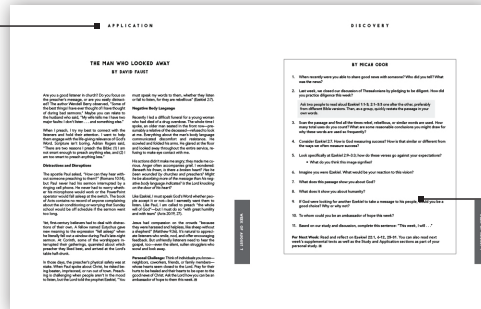
## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



**Tabs** indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

**WEEK OF AUGUST 7, 2022**

**LESSON AIM:** **Take in God's Word so you do not rebel against him and so you can speak up for him.**

**UNIT:** Ezekiel (Part 1)

**THEME:** Sin & Consequences

**LESSON TEXT:** Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:1-3:3

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Revelation 10:2, 9-10; Matthew 10:24-33;  
2 Timothy 2:15

## SENT TO A REBELLIOUS PEOPLE

BY MARK SCOTT

One of the toughest jobs in the Bible was being a prophet. Even though prophets brought God's Word to God's people, they were reviled, misunderstood, and persecuted. One did not go shopping for a prophetic mantle; it was given by the call of God.

Ezekiel suffered just like the other prophet-priests, Jeremiah and Zechariah. Ezekiel's message was inextricably linked to his person. Two facts about Ezekiel stand out in this regard: (1) three chapters are devoted to his call—more than any other prophet, and (2) his prophecy is written in first-person singular. For Ezekiel, the message was intensely personal.

**The Setting of the Messenger***Ezekiel 1:1-3*

Ezekiel began his prophetic work by announcing his age. Ezekiel was 30 years old when he began his earthly ministry, just like Jesus. During that *thirtieth year*, Ezekiel was living among the *exiles* (captives). He had been hauled off to Babylonian captivity with King Jehoiachin in 597 BC. He was living near *the Kebar River* (a canal of the Euphrates River). He was identified as a *priest*, and his father (*Buzi*) was named.

Three things identified Ezekiel as a prophet of God: (1) *The heavens were opened, and he saw visions of God.* These phrases indicate divine inspiration. (2) *The word of the Lord came to him.* This phrase (so prominent in Jeremiah) indicates revelation. (3) *The hand of the Lord was on him.* This phrase indicates God's providence on his ministry (similar to that of Ezra and Nehemiah).

**The Calling of the Messenger***Ezekiel 2:1-8a*

The passage missing from our lesson text is Ezekiel's first vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28, which actually is part of his calling). He had a vision of four living creatures (cf. Revelation 4) and four wheels. This vision took place in the contexts of a storm and angels and a throne. All of it served to underline the glory of the Lord. This glory would keep Ezekiel in the fight of his prophetic work, when otherwise he would have given up.

God addressed Ezekiel as *Son of man*. This phrase is used more than 90 times in Ezekiel and 6 times in this

lesson text. It means "special human" (cf. Psalm 8) and would be Jesus' favorite self-designation. For Jesus it also became a divine title (Daniel 7:13-14). Ezekiel had to stand up and give God his undivided attention. The Holy Spirit came into Ezekiel, which allowed him to speak God's message by divine inspiration.

Ezekiel's calling would not be an easy walk. God sent him to a *rebellious nation* (a form of these two words occurs six times in this lesson text out of 25 times in the entire Old Testament). Ezekiel's audience would be like their forefathers—*obstinate* (impudent and stiff-necked) and *stubborn* (strong). They were figuratively spoken of as *briers* and *thorns* and *scorpions*. They just weren't nice people. But at least they would *know that a prophet [was] among them*.

Ezekiel's calling consisted of three challenges from the *Sovereign Lord*: (1) His audience would resist his message; most likely they would not even *listen*—mentioned twice in this text. (2) He was told three times in this section not to be afraid of them or their words. He was in no way to be *terrified* (dismayed) by them. (3) He was not to join in their rebellion. He would need to be sure he was influencing them and that they were not influencing him.

**The Internalizing of the Message***Ezekiel 2:8b-3:3*

Another part of Ezekiel's call concerned a scroll. He had seen creatures and wheels, and now he saw a *hand stretched out to him*. No doubt this was the same hand of providence that was on him earlier (1:3)—the hand of God. In God's hand was a *scroll* (roll or book). The message on the scroll was full since it contained writing on *both sides* (Revelation 5:1).

The content of the message was depressing. The scroll contained words of *lament* (like a dirge or elegy) and *mourning and woe* (no doubt a reference to the judgments on Israel and the nations in Ezekiel 4-32). God told Ezekiel to consume the scroll (cf. Revelation 10:2, 9-10). Like a small child being spoon-fed, Ezekiel opened his mouth and God had him eat the scroll. The scroll was intended to make the prophet bloated. It would *fill* his stomach. Ezekiel noticed that *it tasted as sweet as honey* in his mouth. Even if God's Word is sometimes bitter to hear, it is likened to honey (Psalm 19:10). ■

## APPLICATION

### THE MAN WHO LOOKED AWAY

BY DAVID FAUST

Are you a good listener in church? Do you focus on the preacher's message, or are you easily distracted? The author Wendell Berry observed, "Some of the best things I have ever thought of I have thought of during bad sermons." Maybe you can relate to the husband who said, "My wife tells me I have two major faults: I don't listen . . . and something else."

When I preach, I try my best to connect with the listeners and hold their attention. I want to help them engage with the life-giving relevance of God's Word. Scripture isn't boring. Adrian Rogers said, "There are two reasons I preach the Bible: (1) I am not smart enough to preach anything else, and (2) I am too smart to preach anything less."

#### Distractions and Disruptions

The apostle Paul asked, "How can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14), but Paul never had his sermon interrupted by a ringing cell phone. He never had to worry whether his microphone would work or the PowerPoint operator would fall asleep at the switch. The book of Acts contains no record of anyone complaining about the air conditioning or worrying that Sunday school would be off schedule if the sermon went too long.

Yet, first-century believers had to deal with distractions of their own. A fellow named Eutychus gave new meaning to the expression "fell asleep" when he literally fell out a window during Paul's late-night sermon. At Corinth, some of the worshippers interrupted their gatherings, quarreled about which preacher they liked best, and arrived at the Lord's table half-drunk.

In those days, the preacher's physical safety was at stake. When Paul spoke about Christ, he risked being beaten, imprisoned, or run out of town. Preaching is challenging when people aren't in the mood to listen, but the Lord told the prophet Ezekiel, "You

must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious" (Ezekiel 2:7).

#### Negative Body Language

Recently I led a difficult funeral for a young woman who had died of a drug overdose. The whole time I spoke, an older man seated in the front row—presumably a relative of the deceased—refused to look at me. Everything about the man's body language communicated discomfort and resistance. He scowled and folded his arms. He glared at the floor and looked away throughout the entire service, refusing to make eye contact with me.

His actions didn't make me angry; they made me curious. Anger often accompanies grief. I wondered: *Beneath his frown, is there a broken heart? Has he been wounded by churches and preachers? Might he be absorbing more of the message than his negative body language indicates? Is the Lord knocking on the door of his heart?*

Like Ezekiel, I must speak God's Word whether people accept it or not—but I earnestly want them to listen. Like Paul, I am called to preach "the whole will of God"—but I must do so "with great humility and with tears" (Acts 20:19, 27).

Jesus had compassion on the crowds "because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). It's natural to appreciate listeners who smile, nod, and offer encouraging feedback. But unfriendly listeners need to hear the gospel, too—even the silent, sullen strugglers who scowl and look away.

**Personal Challenge:** Think of individuals you know—neighbors, coworkers, friends, or family members—whose hearts seem closed to the Lord. Pray for their hurts to be healed and their hearts to be open to the good news of Christ. Ask the Lord how you can be an ambassador of hope to them this week. **L**

## DISCOVERY

### BY MICAH ODOR

1. When recently were you able to share good news with someone? Who did you tell? What was the news?
2. Last week, we closed our discussion of Thessalonians by pledging to be diligent. How did you practice diligence this week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:1-3:3** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, quickly restate the passage in your own words.

3. Scan the passage and find all the times *rebel*, *rebellious*, or similar words are used. How many total uses do you count? What are some reasonable conclusions you might draw for why these words are used so frequently?
4. Consider Ezekiel 2:7. How is God measuring success? How is that similar or different from the ways we often measure success?
5. Look specifically at Ezekiel 2:9-3:3; how do these verses go against your expectations?
  - What do you think this image signifies?
6. Imagine you were Ezekiel. What would be your reaction to this vision?
7. What does this passage show you about God?
8. What does it show you about humanity?
9. If God were looking for another Ezekiel to take a message to his people, would you be a good choice? Why or why not?
10. To whom could you be an ambassador of hope this week?
11. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Ezekiel 22:1, 6-12, 25-31**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■