

Unit III: Ezekiel and the Exile of Judah

The Medium Is the Message

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Corinthians 1:2-6

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:1-3:27; 8:1-4; 11:22-25; 24:15-24; 33:30-33

PRINT PASSAGES: Ezekiel 3:10-11; 24:15-24, 27

KEY VERSE

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. (Ezekiel 3:10, KJV)

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He said to me, “Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you.” (Ezekiel 3:10, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Recount Ezekiel’s ministry among the Babylonian exiles.
- Draw inspiration from Ezekiel’s obedience in the face of opposition.
- Testify to God’s purposes through truth telling and sacrifice.

*Key Terms

Captivity (3:11)—Hebrew: *golah* (go-law'): the state of being exiled; “exile” (NIV).

Hear (3:11)—Hebrew: *shama* (shaw-mah'): to obey, listen attentively; “listen” (NIV).

Heart (3:10)—Hebrew: *lebab* (la-bawb'): inner man, mind, will; desire; courage.

Mourn (24:16)—Hebrew: *saphad* (saw-fad'): to wail, “lament” (NIV).

Receive (3:10)—Hebrew: *laqach* (law-kakh'): to take, seize, acquire, bring, marry, accept; “take to heart” (NIV).

Word (24:15)—Hebrew: *dabar* (daw-baw'): matter; thing; speech; command; promise.

***(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**



The Biblical Context

Ezekiel served as both prophet and priest during one of the most turbulent periods in Jewish history. Writing from exile in Babylon, he addressed a community stripped of their homeland, identity, and traditional ways of worship. Today's texts (Ezekiel 3:10-11; 24:15-24, 27) come from two distinct moments in Ezekiel's ministry. The first establishes his prophetic calling, while the second reveals a deeply personal tragedy that God used as a powerful message to His people. These texts were written around 593–571 BC, during the Babylonian Exile, when the Jewish people struggled to maintain their faith and identity in a foreign land. This context particularly resonates with the African American experience of maintaining cultural and spiritual identity through adversity.

Introduction

Contemporary African American communities often face critical moments that test their faith and challenge them to stand firm in their convictions. From navigating workplace discrimination to addressing systemic inequities, from supporting family through crisis to maintaining hope in challenging times, situations arise that require strength, resilience, and wisdom. The story of Ezekiel speaks to moments when individuals and communities must demonstrate faith through actions rather than words. The prophet's journey is an illustration of maintaining dignity and faith in the face of adversity. God can use someone's personal struggles to touch others' lives.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The Call to Faithful Witness (Ezekiel 3:10-11)

KJV

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.

NIV

10 And he said to me, "Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you.

11 "Go now to your people in exile and speak to them. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says,' whether they listen or fail to listen."

Verse 10 delivers a bold instruction that speaks to the essence of authentic ministry. God commanded Ezekiel to take His words into his heart and hear them with his ears, establishing a crucial pattern for spiritual leadership. This dual reception—heart and ears—reflects the African American spiritual tradition where truth must be both intellectually understood and deeply felt. Just as the ancestors did not merely memorize spirituals but let them penetrate their souls, God calls His servants to internalize His message until it becomes part of their

very being. Verse 11 builds upon this foundation with a specific commission that resonates powerfully with the experience of African American believers. The command to “go to your people” (see verse 11) is a reminder that authentic ministry often begins at home, within one’s own community. The instruction to speak “whether they listen or fail to listen” (verse 11b, NIV) acknowledges the reality that truth telling is not always welcomed, even among our own. This mirrors our historical experience where prophetic voices often faced resistance both from within and without the community. Yet, the community must maintain its witness regardless of the response.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does God’s call to speak truth resonate with your own experience of sharing faith within your community? When have you felt challenged to deliver difficult messages to those close to you?

Personal Loss as a Prophetic Message (*Ezekiel 24:15-24*)

KJV

15 Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

16 Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down.

17 Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.

18 So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.

19 And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?

20 Then I answered them, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

21 Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieh; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword.

22 And ye shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men.

23 And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another.

24 Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

NIV

15 The word of the LORD came to me:

16 “Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears.

17 “Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your sandals on your feet; do not cover your mustache and beard or eat the customary food of mourners.”

18 So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded.

19 Then the people asked me, “Won’t you tell us what these things have to do with us? Why are you acting like this?”

20 So I said to them, “The word of the LORD came to me:

21 “Say to the people of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to desecrate my sanctuary—the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your affection. The sons and daughters you left behind will fall by the sword.

22 “And you will do as I have done. You will not cover your mustache and beard or eat the customary food of mourners.

23 “You will keep your turbans on your heads and your sandals on your feet. You will not mourn or weep but will waste away because of your sins and groan among yourselves.

24 “Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD.”

This passage represents one of the most profound intersections of personal pain and prophetic purpose in Scripture. Verses 15-16 record God’s extraordinary requirement of His servant. The tender phrase “delight of your eyes” used to describe Ezekiel’s wife reveals the depth of love in their relationship, making God’s command not to mourn even more challenging. This mirrors moments when personal loss collides with public ministry. Verse 17 notes the detailed prohibitions against traditional mourning practices—from the removal of traditional headgear to the covering of the face, from the sharing of mourning bread to public expressions of grief. These all highlight the radical nature of God’s demand. In the African American tradition, where communal grieving and celebration of life hold deep cultural significance, one can particularly appreciate the weight of this sacrifice. Verses 18-19 showcase Ezekiel’s remarkable obedience: despite the fresh wound of losing his beloved wife, he maintained his public ministry. His community’s questioning reveals how his unusual response to grief created an opportunity for witness. Unusual responses to hardship often open doors for testimony. The culmination in verses 20-24 transforms Ezekiel’s personal tragedy into prophetic theater. His explanation to the people reveals how God can use intense pain as a platform for His message. Ezekiel’s loss became a powerful message about the coming judgment and the need for repentance.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does Ezekiel’s experience of using personal pain for God’s purpose speak to your own journey of faith? When have you seen God use difficult personal experiences to minister to others?

The Power of Silent Witness (Ezekiel 24:27)

KJV

27 In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb: and thou shalt be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

NIV

27 “At that time your mouth will be opened; you will speak with him and will no longer be silent. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.”

Verse 27 stands as a powerful testament to God’s perfect timing and the transformative power of obedient waiting. In this verse, God promised that Ezekiel’s season of silence would end at precisely the right moment—when the news of Jerusalem’s fall reached the exiles. This divine timing reveals how God orchestrates every detail of our witness for maximum impact. The promise that Ezekiel “will no longer be silent” (verse 27b, NIV) carries profound implications about the relationship between suffering and testimony. Just as a musician’s rest makes the following note more impactful, Ezekiel’s period of silence would make his eventual words more powerful. His experience teaches us that our seasons of quiet endurance often prepare us for moments of powerful witness. This pattern—suffering, silence, then speaking—mirrors the African American spiritual tradition where songs of liberation often emerged from periods of intense tribulation. God may call an individual or community to seasons of quiet endurance, but these times are not permanent. When God breaks the silence, the resulting testimony carries the weight of faithful endurance, speaking with an authority that can only come from having walked through the valley while trusting in God’s purpose.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In what ways have you witnessed the power of faithful action speaking louder than words? How might silent witness be effective in our current cultural context?

A Closing Thought

Ezekiel’s journey shows that God often calls the faithful to be living testimonies in ways that they might never choose for themselves. This unusual story prompts consideration of how our personal experiences, even painful ones, can become powerful messages of God’s faithfulness and sovereignty. African American believers stand in a long tradition of those who have transformed suffering into testimony, and pain into purpose. This legacy encourages trust in God’s purpose for personal struggles and faithfulness in personal witness.

Your Life

Apply Ezekiel’s example of strength and obedience in difficult circumstances. Trust that God can use your experiences—both joyful and painful—to speak to others. Let your life speak