

Unit III: Ezekiel and the Exile of Judah

To Everything Turn, Turn, Turn

DEVOTIONAL READING: Jeremiah 17:5-10

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Ezekiel 18:1-32; 33:1-20

PRINT PASSAGE: Ezekiel 33:7-16a

KEY VERSE

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. (Ezekiel 33:7, KJV)

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“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.” (Ezekiel 33:7, NIV)

Lesson Aims

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

- Explore the role of repentance in restoring the relationship with God.
- Rejoice in the knowledge that God does not want to punish.
- Turn from sin and the power of evil and toward all that is good, kind, and faithful.

*Key Terms

Deliver (verse 12, KJV)—Hebrew: *natsal* (naw-tsal'): to rescue, snatch away, save; make whole.

Delivered (verse 9)—Hebrew: *natsal* (naw-tsal'): snatched away; rescued; recovered; “saved” (NIV).

Iniquity (verse 8)—Hebrew: *avon* (aw-vone'): guilt; perversity; evil; “sin” (NIV).

Transgressions (verse 10)—Hebrew: *pesha* (peh'-shah): rebellious acts; “offenses” (NIV).

Turn (verse 11)—Hebrew: *shub* (shoob): to turn back, return, restore, repent; retreat.

Watchman (verse 7)—Hebrew: *tsaphah* (tsaw-faw'): one who looks out or about, spies, keeps watch, observes, waits for.

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



The Biblical Context

Ezekiel delivered these words during one of the darkest periods in Jewish history—the Babylonian exile. As a priest-turned-prophet, he spoke to a displaced people who had lost everything: their homes, their Temple, and their sense of identity. The year was approximately 587 BC, and Jerusalem was about to fall to Babylonian forces. Drawing on the familiar image of a city watchman—someone who stood guard on the walls to warn of approaching danger—God established Ezekiel as a spiritual watchman over Israel. This metaphor would have resonated deeply with the exiles, as watchmen literally held the power of life and death through their vigilance. The passage bridges divine warning with hope, offering a path to redemption even in the midst of judgment.

Introduction

The African American community faces challenges that have echoed through generations—from advocating for justice in neighborhoods to guiding youth through an increasingly complex world. Many shoulder heavy responsibilities as church leaders, grandparents raising grandchildren, mentors to troubled youth, and community activists fighting for change. Like the ancestors who established the Underground Railroad, built thriving churches, and organized for civil rights, each generation must understand what it means to stand watch over the community. The message of Ezekiel 33:7-16a speaks directly to this legacy of responsibility and redemption. It resonates particularly with those who have witnessed both the struggles and triumphs of communities and have seen neighborhoods transformed, families rebuilt, and lives redirected through faithful intervention.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Divine Appointment and Sacred Duty (Ezekiel 33:7-9)

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.

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.

NIV

7 “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.

8 “When I say to the wicked, ‘You wicked person, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood.

9 “But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved.”

The divine appointment described in verse 7 establishes a profound spiritual covenant between God and His chosen watchman. This appointment mirrors the sacred responsibilities carried by African American spiritual leaders throughout history—from the secret prayer meetings during slavery to the pulpits of the Civil Rights Movement. Just as watchmen in ancient cities stood on physical walls to protect their communities, God calls spiritual watchpersons to protect their people from moral and spiritual danger.

Verse 8 presents a sobering reality that resonates deeply with our community’s experience. When youth are drawn into violence, families are breaking under economic pressure, and neighbors are falling into destructive patterns, the community and its leaders cannot remain silent. The text announces that silence in the face of impending danger makes everyone complicit. This mirrors the wisdom of elders who teach that seeing wrong and doing nothing about it is just another kind of wrong. The instructions in verse 9 offer both challenge and comfort. When warning others—whether through mentoring, counseling, or speaking truth to power—one fulfills a sacred obligation before God, regardless of how others respond.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In what ways are you currently serving as a watchperson in your family or community? What makes this role challenging?

The Heart of God Revealed (Ezekiel 33:10-11)

KJV

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: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

NIV

10 “Son of man, say to the Israelites, ‘This is what you are saying: “Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?”’

11 “Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?’”

These verses unveil God’s deep compassion and desire for redemption, speaking directly to communities familiar with struggle and resilience. Verse 10 captures the voice of collective despair—people feeling overwhelmed by their circumstances and past decisions. This resonates

with those in our communities who feel trapped by systemic injustice, generational trauma, or personal mistakes. In verse 11, we encounter God's passionate response—a declaration that challenges punitive justice systems and offers hope for transformation. This divine perspective calls us to reject fatalistic attitudes about "troubled youth" or "hopeless cases." Instead, it compels us to believe in and work for redemption, much like the educators, mentors, and community leaders who see potential where others see problems. Consider how this message might transform our approach to community restoration. Rather than writing people off, we're called to create pathways for redemption. This might mean supporting reentry programs for returning citizens, creating mentorship opportunities for at-risk youth, or establishing support systems for recovering addicts. God's heart for restoration should shape our response to community challenges.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does God's desire for redemption rather than punishment challenge perceptions and attitudes toward those in the community who have gone astray?

Justice, Repentance, and Restoration (*Ezekiel 33:12-16a*)

KJV

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.

NIV

12 "Therefore, son of man, say to your people, 'If someone who is righteous disobeys, that person's former righteousness will count for nothing. And if someone who is wicked repents, that person's former wickedness will not bring condemnation. The righteous person who sins will not be allowed to live even though they were formerly righteous.'

13 "If I tell a righteous person that they will surely live, but then they trust in their righteousness and do evil, none of the righteous things that person has done will be remembered; they will die for the evil they have done.

14 “And if I say to a wicked person, ‘You will surely die,’ but they then turn away from their sin and do what is just and right—

15 “if they give back what they took in pledge for a loan, return what they have stolen, follow the decrees that give life, and do no evil—that person will surely live; they will not die.

16 “None of the sins that person has committed will be remembered against them.”

This section presents a radical vision of justice that prioritizes transformation over condemnation. Verses 12-13 warn against complacency and the danger of relying on past acts of righteousness. This speaks to both individual and institutional accountability. Just as a person’s good reputation cannot excuse current misconduct, our churches and organizations must maintain an active, ongoing commitment to justice and service.

Verses 14-15 outline the practical path of repentance, emphasizing that transformation requires both internal change and external action. This might involve making restitution, changing destructive behaviors, or actively working to repair damaged relationships. The text provides a blueprint for restorative justice that many African American communities have long practiced—believing in the possibility of redemption while requiring concrete steps toward change.

Verse 16a concludes with God’s promise of complete restoration for those who genuinely repent. This message offers hope to families struggling with prodigal children, communities working to rehabilitate former offenders, and individuals seeking to rebuild their lives. It challenges the community and the church to create environments where transformation is possible and expected.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can we create community spaces that encourage genuine repentance and support lasting transformation?

A Closing Thought

This passage reminds us that being a watchperson is a sacred duty and a divine privilege. Like the ancestors who watched over communities during times of struggle, today’s church is called to stand guard—not with weapons of war, but with words of warning and wisdom. The assignment is not to condemn but to guide, not to judge but to offer hope. Those who embrace this responsibility with humility and courage participate in God’s redemptive work in families, churches, and communities.

Your Life

Take time daily to assess your sphere of influence—your family, workplace, church, or neighborhood. Look for opportunities to speak truth in love, warn those facing danger, and encourage those seeking change. Remember that your words and actions can catalyze someone’s transformation. Stay alert to the physical and spiritual needs of those around you.

Your World

Share your own story of transformation and the watchpersons that God has placed in your life. Talk about how someone's warning or encouragement changed your direction. Let others know that change is possible and that God desires their restoration. Create safe spaces for honest conversation—where truth can be spoken and hope can take root.

Closing Prayer

Lord, grant us the wisdom to watch faithfully, the courage to speak truth, and the compassion to lead others toward Your redemptive love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Please be prepared for next week's lesson. The lesson topic for Sunday, November 30, 2025, is "Hope Floats." The Devotional Reading is Revelation 7:9-17, the Background Scripture is Ezekiel 47:1-12, and the Print Passage is Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, November 24	“God Breathes New Life”	(Ezekiel 37:1-7)
TUESDAY, November 25	“A Resurrection of Hope”	(Ezekiel 37:8-14)
WEDNESDAY, November 26	“The Thirsty Will Be Refreshed”	(Isaiah 55:1-9)
THURSDAY, November 27	“Rivers of Living Water”	(John 7:2-10, 37-39)
FRIDAY, November 28	“Hope for God’s New Creation”	(Revelation 21:1-7)
SATURDAY, November 29	“The Tree of Life”	(Revelation 22:1-5)
SUNDAY, November 30	“The River of Life”	(Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12)

NOTES