

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)

Life Happens

A bright and ambitious software developer, Sharon stumbled upon a disturbing secret: a colleague intentionally inserted bugs into their collaborative codebase. This malicious act was not an oversight; it was a calculated move designed to undermine the credibility of other team members, tarnishing their hard work and professional reputations. Caught in a moral dilemma, Sharon grappled with the weight of her decision: should she bring this unethical behavior to management’s attention, risking her standing



Overview

The passage of Ezekiel 33:7-16a is situated in the historical context of the Babylonian Exile, a devastating period marked by national crisis and upheaval for the people of Israel. During this time, many Israelites faced the harsh realities of living in captivity and the profound loss of their homeland, especially after the destruction of Jerusalem—which had been the spiritual and political center of their community. Ezekiel, who served dual roles as both prophet and priest, received this vital message from God while the Israelites grappled with the dire consequences of their collective actions. This message serves as a wake-up call, urging the people to reflect on their choices and the need for change.

The metaphor of the watchman is particularly significant; it is derived from ancient military practices prevalent in the Middle East. The watchman was responsible for guarding the city walls and alerting the inhabitants to any approaching danger or enemy. This imagery would have been familiar and powerful to the original audience, who understood the crucial importance of vigilance and protection. This section emphasizes personal responsibility and accountability. Individuals are urged to recognize their role in the community's fate and the consequences of their actions.

in the company—or should she remain silent and allow the wrongdoer to continue harming others? This dilemma resonates strongly with the profound responsibility outlined in Ezekiel 33. Silence is not always golden. In fact, in the face of evil, silence can have serious repercussions.

Questions

1. How do you balance personal safety and moral responsibility when confronting unethical behavior?
2. What obstacles or fears prevent us from stepping forward when we witness acts of unethical behavior?

COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The Sacred Duty of the Watchman (*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.”

In this profound biblical passage, God appointed Ezekiel as a spiritual watchman for the nation of Israel, drawing a compelling parallel to the vigilant military sentinels who safeguarded ancient cities

against potential threats. In verse 7, we witness the significance of this divine commissioning, which marked the start of an essential responsibility that was both challenging and vital for the community. The spiritual watchman's role as described in verse 8 carries weighty implications. Should the watchman neglect to warn others about imminent dangers—whether they be moral decline, external adversities, or impending divine judgment—he bore a portion of the accountability for the ensuing consequences that impacted both individuals and the broader community. Verse 9 encapsulates a dual message of reassurance and challenge. If the watchman diligently fulfilled his duty of delivering clear and timely warnings, then he was absolved of responsibility for the decisions made by others in response to those warnings. This aspect underlines the crucial importance of effective communication and heroic leadership in times of uncertainty and peril. Ultimately, the appointment of Ezekiel as a watchman served to inspire a steadfast commitment to vigilance, clarity, and responsibility. It called upon leaders and individuals alike to embrace their roles in guiding and protecting their communities from potential harm while fostering a culture of awareness and proactive integrity. Such dedication is essential for the well-being of any society.

 **What Do You Think?** What are the consequences of remaining silent when we should speak up?

The Message of Hope and Responsibility (*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?’”

In verse 10, we encounter the profound despair of the people who found themselves entangled in guilt and weighed down by the burdens of their choices. Their cries reflect a deep longing for clarity and hope amid the difficult consequences they faced. This sense of hopelessness illustrates the emotional and spiritual turmoil that often accompanies a recognition of one's failings. In verse 11, God's response shines brightly against this backdrop of despair, revealing His compassionate nature. He declared that He takes no pleasure in punishing the wicked; His heart is not set on retribution but on redemption. God passionately called the people to repentance, urging them to turn away from their wrongdoings and embrace the possibility of restoration. This powerful message underscores His desire not just for punishment but for transformation.

and reconciliation. These verses reveal a God whose love transcends judgment, inviting each individual into a relationship defined by grace and the promise of renewal. The call to personal responsibility remains vital, as it emphasizes that choices matter and that everyone has the opportunity to pursue a fresh start.

Q What Do You Think? How does God's yearning for restoration shape the way we view accountability?

The Path of 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."

Ezekiel 33 explores divine justice and the power of personal change. This passage shows that one's spiritual path depends on current choices, not just past actions. Verses 12-13 state that a good track record does not guarantee a secure future. This encourages continual personal growth and accountability. Verses 14-16a outline the important steps of true repentance. It is essential to make amends for past

mistakes. This effort helps heal and restore our relationships. By repairing the damage, one not only can help those whom he or she may have harmed, but also can build empathy and understanding. It is also important to make real behavioral changes. This shows a genuine desire to improve in life. True change is only possible when beliefs match actions, demonstrating commitment to a better path. Everyone has the ability to change.

 What Do You Think? What role does restitution play in genuine repentance?

Your Life

This passage emphasizes that serving as a watchman is both a sacred responsibility and a respected honor. Just as our ancestors watched over their communities during difficult times, we, too, are called to be vigilant—not with weapons, but with messages of caution and insight. Our mission is not to condemn but to lead, not to judge but to offer hope. When we embrace this duty with humility and courage, we participate in God’s redemptive mission within our families, churches, and communities. Embrace these principles by becoming more aware of your role as a modern-day watchman in your sphere of influence. Whether at work, in relationships, or on social media, you have opportunities to speak truth with love and advocate for justice. Reflect on areas where fear might be silencing your voice, and cultivate the courage to speak up while remaining humble and compassionate.

Your World!

Show your commitment to ethical leadership and moral courage in your job and personal life. Let your dedication to truth and justice, balanced with mercy and hope, reflect Christ’s character to others. Create safe spaces for discussion on tough issues, and help others as they work toward positive change.

 Closing Prayer

Lord, grant us the wisdom to be faithful watchmen, the courage to speak truth with love, and the grace to support others in their journey of transformation. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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)