

Hearing God's Voice Today

Eat the Scroll to Understand

Ezekiel 2:1 And he said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you." 2 And as he spoke to me, **the Spirit entered into me** and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. 3 And he said to me, "Son of man, **I send you to the people of Israel**, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. 4 The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' 5 And **whether they hear or refuse to hear** (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them. 6 And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though **briers and thorns** are with you and you sit on **scorpions**. Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. 7 And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house.

8 "But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; **open your mouth and eat what I give you.**" 9 And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. 10 And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

3 And he said to me, "Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." 2 So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. 3 And he said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.

4 And he said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them. 5 For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel— 6 not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to such, they would listen to you. 7 But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are

not willing to listen to me: because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. ⁸ Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads. ⁹ Like emery harder than flint have I made your forehead. Fear them not, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.” ¹⁰ Moreover, he said to me, “Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. ¹¹ And go **to the exiles**, to your people, and speak to them and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’ whether they hear or refuse to hear.”

¹² Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me **the voice of a great earthquake**: “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from its place!” ¹³ It was the sound of **the wings of the living creatures** as they touched one another, and the sound of **the wheels** beside them, and the sound of a great earthquake. ¹⁴ The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me. ¹⁵ And I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar canal, and I sat where they were dwelling. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days.

(Ezekiel 2:1-3:15)

Modern Day “Prophets?”

In a world flooded with voices from social media influencers, to spiritual gurus, to Christians, some well-meaning and some not—**how do we hear God’s true voice?** How do we discern truth through the noise of competing claims? Who speaks for God when everyone says, “**God told me**”? Today, we’ll explore Ezekiel’s call to discover the marks of a true

prophet and what that means for us. Let's begin by looking at some foils.

Mani was a 3rd-century Persian prophet who founded Manichaeism. He claimed divine revelations from a “Twin Spirit” came to him as he sought to synthesize Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism into a universal religion. His self-proclaimed title as the “**Apostle of Light**” promised salvation through esoteric knowledge, but his dualistic teachings, which pitted light against darkness, led followers away from biblical truth. This resembled **Deut 13:1–5**'s warning against false teachers who lead you astray to worship false gods. Early Christians, including **Augustine** of Hippo, who was a Manichaean for nine years before converting, rejected Mani's claims as heretical for contradicting Scripture. In his **Confessions**, he reflects, “**Being ignorant of these things, I scoffed at God's holy servants and prophets. And what did I gain by scoffing at them, but to be scoffed at by You, Lord, being insensibly and step by step drawn on to those follies**” (Book III; language modernized).

More recently, you may remember NXIVM, founded by **Keith Raniere** in 1998. Calling himself the “**Vanguard**” claiming universal wisdom and enlightenment through self-

help workshops, he carried a pseudo-spiritual aura that deceived followers into viewing him as a quasi-divine, transcendent authority. Presented publicly as “Executive Success Programs,” NXIVM was exposed as a cult engaging in racketeering, sex trafficking, forced labor, and other crimes. A secretive subgroup called “Master over Slave Women” (or DOS from “*Dominus Obsequious Sororium*”) operated as a sex cult where women were coerced into becoming “slaves,” literally branded with Ranieri’s initials, and forced to do unspeakable and unthinkable acts. He even drew famous Hollywood stars such as Allison Mack of *Smallville* fame into his web under the pretense of personal growth. He was arrested in 2020 and is serving 120 years in prison. Claiming transcendent truth apart from God’s Word leads only to darkness.

Or how about **Bethel Church** (Redding, CA), whose Bethel Music fills modern churches with songs like “**Reckless Love**,” with lyrics so vague and subjective that those who aren’t even remotely Christian can sing them. Rooted in the **New Apostolic Reformation**—a movement **claiming modern prophets and apostles** and signs like “**glory clouds**” or “**grave-sucking**” where the person will go and lay beside the grave of a dead Christian in order to absorb a spiritual anointing—they chase practices that echo **Jeremiah 23:16**’s

warning of voices from human minds. Practicing something called “**prophetic activation**,” they highly prioritize experience over Scripture, like the rebellious Israel of **Ezekiel 2:3**. Bethel’s practices reflect New Age tendencies by chasing subjective, mystical experiences over Scripture, their own deceived voice over God’s.

Finally, **closer to home**, which as you will see later is sometimes important if not also challenging to think about, ponder **some in even our own Reformed Baptist circles** who, with fervent confessional zeal, wield doctrinal standards to condemn like-minded brothers, dismissing those who cling to *sola scriptura* over tradition as errant souls and “biblicists.” They bypass Scripture’s and even their own Confession’s mandate to settle disputes by biblical authority alone (LBC 1.10), instead **favoring human philosophies** or human voices they elsewhere spurn as the antichrist as their equivalent of modern “prophets,” all while shielding their own or overlooking grievous sin. Their campaigns, cloaked in doctrinal righteousness, yield strife, pride, and division, rather than the Spirit’s love, joy, or peace. Such voices, like Israel’s rebels, may claim to hear God, yet their fruit betrays a heart deaf to His call, setting themselves as arbiters over God’s people, blind to God’s Word alone that is our judge.

Ezekiel 2:1-3:15 in Context

The London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), which is the doctrinal standard of our church, and which we believe to be a wonderful, helpful, yet non-exhaustive and man-written guide to sound, biblical theology, begins with **an entire chapter talking about how the Bible alone** is “**the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience**” (LBC 1.1). It goes on to reiterate *sola scriptura* saying, “**The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture**” and then adding “**unto which nothing at any time is to be added, *whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men***” (1.6). This is ultimately how our tradition teaches that you hear God's voice today. But how did we get here?

There are **two main passages** from prior biblical revelation that provide a theological and conceptual backdrop for Ezekiel's call in **Ezekiel 2:1-3:15**. The first is **Deuteronomy 18:15-22**. This passage defines **a true prophet as God's mouthpiece**, speaking *only His words* (**18:18**), proven by ful-

fillment (18:22), which the people must heed as God will require an accounting (19). False prophets presume to speak in God's name things he never commanded them to speak, leading people astray (20). Obviously, those things continue to happen even into our own day.

Jeremiah 23:16–32 is the other. It teaches us that true prophets “stand in the council of the Lord to see and to hear his Word” (23:18, 22). Unlike false prophets who lie, (23:16), whom God does not send, but they run and speak things he never said (21), the true prophet stands in the council of the Lord, that is in the heavenly divine council (Ps 82:1), where they see and talk to the Word of God and proclaim his words to his people so that they might turn from their evil way and the evil of their deeds (Jer 23:22).

Enter our text today. We are fresh off the heels of Ezekiel 1 where Ezekiel the priest (Ezek 1:1) sees a fantastical vision of a heavenly chariot throne driven by awe-inspiring cherubim who carry aloft one “with a human (‘adam) appearance” (26) whose presence was like gleaming metal, fire, brightness, and the rainbow in the cloud. While the wings of the heavenly attendants’ are themselves so turbulent and violent that they sound like “many waters” and the sound of an army (24),

when this one with a human appearance speaks, there is **silence**. Ezekiel is standing in the middle of the heavenly divine council and he is about to hear from the Lord, indeed from the preincarnate Second Person of the Holy Trinity. “**And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking...**” (1:28).

Ezekiel 2:1-3:15 gives us **the call of Ezekiel**. The call of a prophet is biblically significant because it establishes the prophet as God’s chosen mouthpiece, directly commissioned by the divine presence, in on objective divine encounter with the Living God. This is **no mere experience or subjective feeling**. Nor is he telling you believe him because he said so. This divine encounter, rooted in the divine council, underscores the prophet’s authority and responsibility to speak God’s words faithfully to a rebellious people, regardless of their response (**Ezek 2:5**). This call **authenticates the prophet’s mission** and aligns with the biblical pattern of God’s direct intervention to appoint mediators of His covenant. Similar prophetic calls appear in other books, notably **Isaiah 6** (**Isaiah’s** vision of God’s throne), **Jeremiah 1:4–10** (**Jeremiah’s** commissioning before birth), 1 Samuel 3 (**Samuel’s** calling as a boy) and **Amos 7:14–15** (**Amos’** divine summons), each emphasizing a transformative encounter with the preincarnate Christ

that equips the prophet to confront sin and proclaim divine truth as they prepare to bring OT covenant lawsuits against God's people for their violation of the clearly stated covenantal obligations they were given in the days of Moses—the greatest prophet whose encounters with the living Word of God are the stuff of legend.

Our passage comes in the larger context of **Chs. 1-11** which parallels the end of the book's so-called “**third temple.**” In these early chapters God comes to and then departs *the temple* of Solomon. The way these 11 chapters are organized, Chs. 2:1-3:15 **parallel** Chs. 10-11.

- A. Vision of God's Glory (Ch. 1)
- B. Prophetic Commissioning (Chs. 2-3)
- C. Judgment Proclaimed (Chs. 4-7)
- D. Abominations and Judgment (Chs. 8-9)**
- C'. Judgment Executed (Ch. 10)
- B'. Glory's Departure Begins (Chs. 10-11)
- A'. Departure of God's Glory (Ch. 11)

For example, in 2-3, God commissions Ezekiel as a prophet to a rebellious Israel, tasking him to deliver His message faithfully, no matter what their response (**2:3-5; 3:7-11**). In 10-11, Ezekiel's prophetic role continues as he witnesses the

reports the departure of God's glory (which he sees in his own vision in Babylon; 1:28) and intercedes for the remnant (11:13-21). Ezekiel must continue as God's mouthpiece, whether he proclaims judgment or mediates hope. The theme of Israel as a "rebellious house" (2:5-6; 3:9), continues in their idolatry that is fleshed out in Chs. 8-9 which directly leads to the departure of God's glory, a direct consequence of their sin (10:18; 11:23). Ezekiel is spiritually and physically mobilized, commanded to stand (2:1) and go to the exiles (3:11), and later bound and silenced (14-15), while the movement of God's glory from the east gate (10:19; 11:23) symbolizes that God is beginning to withdrawal.

Our passage is technically part of the chiasm that takes place between 1:1-3:15. We were unable to do all of that in one week, but it is important to mention, because you must not divorce the context of ch. 1 from that of 2:1-3:15. To do that destroys the whole point that Ezekiel has now stood in God's council, as Jeremiah puts it. Besides, 3:12-15 return us to the sounding of the cherubim wings, the wheels, the "glory of the LORD," and even the setting by the Chebar canal in Babylon.

- A. Setting (exile, Kebar River), visions of God, prophet's call (1:1-3)
- B. Vision of Glory (creatures, wheels, throne), Ezekiel falls facedown (1:4-28)
- C. Empowerment (Spirit enters, Ezekiel stands) (2:1-2)
- D. Mission to rebellious Israel, "Whether they listen..." (2:3-5)
- E. Speak without fear, despite opposition (2:6-7)
- F. Eat scroll (God's word internalized, sweet yet lamentation) (2:8-3:3)**
- E'. Speak without fear, forehead like flint (3:4-9)
- D'. Mission to rebellious Israel, "whether they listen" (3:10-11)
- C'. Empowerment (Spirit lifts, wing's sound) (3:12-14a)
- B'. Vision of glory (wheels' sound, "glory of the Lord") (3:12b-14)
- A'. Setting (Tel Abib, exiles), Ezekiel overwhelmed (3:14b-15)¹

The Call of Ezekiel—2:1-7; 3:4-11

Ch. 1 leaves off with **Ezekiel on his face** about to hear from God. Long ago, Jerome rightly pointed out that Ezekiel "is not carried away by the greatness of the visions, but he falls on his own face through knowing the fragility of the human being" (**Jerome**, *Commentary on Ezekiel* 1.2.1).² This may be the most important thing you can begin with as you

¹ While it is common to preach all of chapters 2-3 together, I think this strains the text too much, even though it might make for some good preaching devices. Furthermore, the stuff at the end of ch. 3 about "watchmen"

For example, a series of five "commissions": First Commission (Rebels) (2:1-7); The Sweet Scroll (2:8-3:3); Second Commission (Poor Listeners) (3:4-9); Third Commission (Lifted by the Spirit) (3:10-15); Fourth Commission (Watchman for Israel) (3:16-21); Fifth Commission (Dumbness) (3:22-27). See Douglas Stuart and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Ezekiel*, vol. 20, The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1989), 33.

² Kenneth Stevenson and Michael Gluerup, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 13 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 17.

learn about hearing God's voice—both for yourself or from others. Ezekiel **knows he is a sinner**. True encounters with the living God always destroy pride; they never increase it!

But you also fall on your face in the Bible to **worship**. “And he said to me, ‘Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you’” (**Ezek 2:1**). He doesn't say, “**Stop kneeling, I'm only an angel. Don't worship me.**” Yet this one like a son of man does tell him to stand. Ezekiel must prepare himself like a man.

But before moving on, we need to speak for a moment about this title “**Son of man**.” Appearing 93 times in Ezekiel, this is by far and away the most of any OT book. The only time it is used is in a significantly different sense is in **Daniel 7:13** where one “**like a son of man**” comes to the Ancient of Days to receive a kingdom in the presence of the divine council. Here, it describes **a heavenly being who is also somehow like a human**. This is an idea that will be picked up by later Jews in the second part of 1 Enoch, where the title becomes a significant one for **a pre-existent Messianic figure** that is prophesied to come. Of course, this then is the title that Jesus will use of himself in the Gospels where I would argue that it refers both to this supernatural heavenly idea of Daniel, but also to the one that it exclusively means in Ezekiel.

What is that? Consider the preceding context that we have already brought up. It is the glorious heavenly figure “a likeness with a human appearance” on the divine throne (Ezek 1:26), similar but not identical language to Daniel 7. This is the preincarnate Christ, who is now speaking to Ezekiel, addressing *him* as “Son of Man.” This sets a profound theological stage. This contrast highlights the chasm between divine majesty and human frailty, as the exalted One commissions a mortal prophet to speak His words. The title underscores Ezekiel’s *humanity*, dependence on God’s Spirit, and role as a faithful messenger to rebellious Israel, regardless of their response. Its importance grounds Ezekiel’s prophetic identity and foreshadows the messianic “Son of Man” fulfilled in Jesus, who bridges divinity and humanity.

“And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me” (2). Do you remember the famous story that actually appears later in Ezekiel where the prophet sees a valley of dry bones and is asked if they can stand and come to life? This is its prelude. The very same thing happens here to Ezekiel. It is a spiritual idea. Gregory the Great said, “The divine voice commanded the prophet as he lay and bade him rise. But he could in no way have risen if the Spirit of the Almighty had not entered into

him, because by the grace of almighty God we can indeed try to perform good works but cannot carry them through unless he who commands us helps us” (Gregory, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 1.9.2).³

“And he said to me, ‘Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day’” (3). This establishes the audience that Ezekiel is called to prophecy to. The term “Israel” might at first let the house of *Judah* feel like they were off the hook, as at this time there had long been a split between the two nations. It is human nature to think that everyone *but me* is a sinner! So God must be going after “them” again. But “Israel” had been taken into captivity 120 years earlier. They are effectively gone. This makes the word dramatically ironic. Because the fact is, Israel is the tribal name of *all* the descendants of Jacob, not just the northern tribes.⁴ In using this term, he is setting the remaining tribes up for a shattering fall, for they too are a nation of rebels and have been since the days of Moses. For Ezekiel doesn’t merely mean one generation, but the entire history of the nation.

³ Stevenson, 17.

⁴ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross and Klaus Baltzer, *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979–), 132–133.

He continues, “The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God’” (4). This was the job of the prophet. He was to speak God’s word alone. Not his own words. God’s words. The only prophets we have today in this sense are those that continue to speak God’s *written* word to the people. That’s why it is so vital to be grounded in *sola scriptura* and that God’s word is both complete, final, and authoritative for us today. But it was not so then. It was still being written.

Next begins the tough part for the prophet. “And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them” (5). God isn’t promising that they won’t hear, but it doesn’t look good. Human depravity is not the view that people can’t understand with their minds something you tell them about their sin. It is that they do not have the spiritual capacity to care or to change. Rebels *don’t want* to hear because it means stopping what they are doing and repenting of their sins against God. And what person that loves their sin wants to do that?

It is the *knowing that a prophet has been among them* that links us back to Jeremiah and Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy importantly predicted,

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’ And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him”

(Deut 18:15-22)

The NT ultimately teaches that this Prophet was Jesus, the Final Prophet in this sense, which is why we now listen to the Scripture for there are none that come after Jesus as a formal prophet. But they did not listen to even him. Yet, it is clear that there would be a line of prophets to come even between Moses and Jesus. Some come as false prophets whom the people must not heed. By the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah, they were nothing but chirping birds telling the sheeple whatever they wanted to hear. Meanwhile, God's real prophets would not only **speak** truth; they would **predict** it so that they might know that a true prophet who had truly stood in the council of the Lord had been among them. Things like this do not happen anymore, precisely because we have the final Prophet Jesus who has given the final word on all things.

The LORD then talks to Ezekiel **as Moses talked to Joshua**, “**And you, son of man, be not afraid of them...**” God's prophets must realize that the people they are sent to are sinful and rebellious, even as they are. It's one reason why standing in the council is so important for them. It puts the fear of God into the true prophet's heart. Those scenes are terrifying and transcendent! He needs to know his own sin so that he might understand that the people are cut from the same cloth.

Since he is a frail son of man, Ezekiel is further told, “... nor be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions” (6). While it is possible that there may be hints of supernatural evil lurking here, especially because scorpions are used elsewhere of such evil (Luke 10:19) and because the people have turned to idols and the gods, the main idea here is clearly one of great discomfort that will befall ... Ezekiel! His will be a ministry of sitting on thorns and briars and among scorpions. This could be a reason to become afraid, thus the heavenly voice reiterates, “Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house” (6b-7). It is good to put ourselves in the place of those we are reading about.

Can you imagine being given a commission like that? Have you ever seen a scorpion? Have you ever sat down on a thornbush? It ought to make you think long and hard about what such a ministry might do to a person and emphasize with their cause. It also ought to cause you to think about what stubborn rebellion against God is depicted as and how it causes people to become scorpions and briars that constantly stings others.

We are going to skip ahead here to 3:4-11. You will see why as we go along. “And he said to me, ‘Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them’” (3:4). We just concluded with virtually the same idea in 2:7. He was to *speak God’s words to the house of Israel*. But now he begins to specify the meaning, something that will continue all the way through vs. 11. It begins, “For you are not sent to *a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel*” (5). Ezekiel is not going to be a prophet like Jonah or Nahum who were sent to the *Assyrians in Nineveh*, or like Obadiah who was sent to *Edom*. Ezekiel might have thought as much since he was in Babylon. But no, he will be like the prophets of old, sent to the old covenant people of God. “... *not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand*” (6a).

Is this good or bad news? The next words tell you that this will be a very difficult assignment. “*Surely, if I sent you to such, they would listen to you*” (6b). While hinting at how the Gentiles will repent because they have no prior relationship with the LORD, this is like Jesus who says that a prophet is not without honor, *except in his hometown* and among his relatives and in his own household (Mark 6:4). Remember Jonah? He goes to Nineveh and they immediately repent, much

to his profound dismay. But it is **speaking truth to your own people** that is the harder task.

That's why I brought up in the introduction the need to **sometimes call out people even in our own ranks** when they behave in ways that are in rebellion to God even as they pat themselves on the back for how doctrinally righteous they are, for surely, this is the way of all people, is it not? Only the absolute worst of humanity openly and brazenly commit evil calling it evil. I dare say even most Satanists would somehow pervert what they do calling it ultimately good. Most people justify their sin by calling it good. How much more those who justify sinning against others with biblical doctrine and purity? I can treat you however I like, because truth is all that matters. Or, I can behave however I want, because the NT God doesn't judge people. So on and so forth. In thinking their actions are Christian, this is what makes it so bad. They already have the truth and they deliberately twist it and call it Christian, to their own destruction.

God finally confirms **what we've suspected** all along. **"But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you..."** (7a). Isaiah was basically told the same thing (**Isa 6:9-10**). **"For how long,"** he asks? **"Until the cities lie waste without inhab-**

itant” (11). Same with Ezekiel, but he is not to take this personally, “... for they are not willing to listen to me: because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart” (Ezek 3:7b). It is a vital thing for a Christian to realize that when they warn someone that when they won’t listen, it isn’t because of them. Hopefully. Yes, we can be jerks in how we present the message. But often, it is because the person has a problem with God himself. The language comes straight out of the Torah all the way back in the days of Moses. The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people” (Ex 32:9), even as the people themselves said, “I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart” (Deut 29:19). People stuck in their own sin repeat these words to themselves often, for it is how they justify continuing to practice their rebellion. God doesn’t hear. God doesn’t care. But God told Israel point blank, “If you will not [repent], behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out” (Num 32:23).

To help the prophet make it through such a calling, the Lord tells him something that should help. “Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads. Like emery harder than flint have I made your forehead. Fear them not, nor be dismayed at their

looks, for they are a rebellious house” (Ezek 3:8-9). Emery is a very hard substance, almost diamond-like material, that was used to cut or grind other stones. Flint, meanwhile, was hard and durable, and used in weapons such as spears and arrow tips. The metaphor is thus that Ezekiel’s hardness will make him durable and unyielding in the face of their piercing attacks. He will set his forehead in determined resilience against the rabble, and he, not they will be victorious. He will confront. His will be the moral high road, the moral superiority, against their immoral rebellion. This is why it is so important for God’s mouthpieces to live lives of moral integrity.

With these words, Ezekiel is ready for the target audience to be narrowed one last time. “Moreover, he said to me, ‘Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. And go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them and say to them, “Thus says the Lord God,” whether they hear or refuse to hear’” (10-11). His is to be a ministry not merely to far off Israelites, via correspondence in letters to those who remain in Israel, but to those very exiles in the land to which they have already been taken captive in Babylon. Though already in captivity, this is not enough. Even they must hear the word and repent.

Ezekiel's Sword—2:1-8-3:3

It is as if Ezekiel is being **called into battle** with this metaphor of emery and flint. If so, what will be his weapon? While not used in this passage—instead, another metaphor will be used—we see in the center of our story that the **weapon** the prophet must wield is the **Word of God**. This is precisely the point I've already stressed about the vital way that we hear God's voice today. Those who do not understand this truth may well turn to everything from false religions to clever philosophers, each of which can land you in the ditch of moral abyss and enmity with God.

“But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you” (**Ezek 2:8**). Ezekiel must be pure. **He must not be rebellious like them**. He must be above them. He must humble himself and repent. For he, too, is but a man.

Now, remember, these words in **Ezekiel 2:8** come on the heels of God telling Ezekiel to “**speak my words to them**” whether they listen or not (**7**). But what words? Suddenly you can see why God is now telling Ezekiel to **open his mouth**, for it is out of the mouth that words come.

“And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it” (9). It is the scroll, not the sword, that becomes the image of this passage. So as he opens up his mouth, a hand—we do not know if it is the man on the throne or one of the living creatures, but it doesn’t really matter ... as he opens his mouth a hand presents a book to him. That’s strange. And yet we know that books have words written on them. That’s their singular function in fact—to preserve words.

“And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe” (10). “Lamentation and mourning and woe” is *qinim vahi v’hegeh*. These three nouns share similar vowel sounds and consonantal patterns (e.g., *qinim* with its sharp q and i sound, *vahi* with its h and i, *v’hegeh* with its h and eh), thus creating a mournful, rhythmic cadence, fitting the scroll’s content and Ezekiel’s somber mission.

Lamentation is an outward expression of deep sorrow, grief, or regret, often in a formal or poetic outcry, as over loss or calamity. *Mourning* is the act or state of grieving, typically involving sadness and rituals of loss, reflecting per-

sonal or communal sorrow. *Woe* is a pronouncement of distress, calamity, or divine judgment, often warning of impending suffering or condemnation. This is a book of bereavement, sadness, and loss. Maybe this is a reason that Ezekiel follows Lamentations and Jeremiah in the biblical canon!

Next comes a rather *bizarre image*. “And he said to me, ‘Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel’” (3:1). I don’t know about you, but the idea of *eating a book* isn’t exactly appealing. Most books were made in those days from *papyrus*, a plant grown in Egypt and imported into places like Israel or Babylon. It’s possible to eat such a thing, but I wouldn’t want to. Then again, it could have been made from *parchment*, the skins of animals, tough like leather and inedible. I simply say this to make you think about eating a book in those days.

The reality is, this is still part of Ezekiel’s heavenly commission and so it is likely that *the book had a supernatural quality*. This seems to be confirmed in what follows, “So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. And he said to me, ‘Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.’ Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey” (2-3). That reminds

me of the manna in the wilderness, “Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey” (Ex 16:31). Of course, manna is the “bread of angels” in the psalms (Ps 78:25), so maybe the scroll was made of manna!

Whatever the case, the image is much more in line with that of Psalm 19:10, “More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb,” is God’s law, statutes, and judgments. Those stuck in sin can’t understand that the judgments of God are sweeter than honey; for they are the words of righteousness and holiness, which is what we all long for even if we do not understand it. But sin clouds our judgment and causes us to lose sight of how good the law actually is. That’s why so many will never eat. It looks inedible. It looks ridiculous—*eating a scroll*! But we are called to taste and see that the Lord is good. This includes internalizing God’s law. That’s how you understand God’s voice. You only taste by putting it in your mouth. As Jeremiah found out, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts” (Jer 15:16). Such is what

all Christians, even those stuck in sin, will discover if they will but eat the words of the Lord.

The image of eating a scroll is found [later in Revelation](#). John is told right after a vision of God that is remarkably similar to Ezekiel's to "[Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land](#)" ([Rev 10:8](#)). His scroll also tasted like honey, but it made his [stomach bitter](#). Sometimes, the truth does that as it creates a reaction in the body that causes us to expel the poison within. That's what the discipline of God for Christians is all about. It purges us.

What's the point of eating the scroll? It signifies [internalizing God's message](#), making the prophet a living embodiment of divine truth. When this happens, even if it makes the stomach bitter (it doesn't say that here), the ultimate discovery is that it becomes a joy and delight, and that's part of how a prophet like Ezekiel could tolerate the calling that he was being commissioned to. If he did not discover the love of God and the truth of God personally through his calling, he never could have made it through the twenty plus years or absolute torment of body and soul that he was going to be put through. [Only when you know the living God by faith, internalizing his word, can you understand.](#) This word

is not far away from you now. It is as near as what you are hearing in this sermon. Will you eat, will you internalize all that you are hearing? Or will you spit the words out of your mouth, because to you they taste bitter and feel inedible? Only by faith will you finally find out.

Ezekiel's Sword—2:1-8-3:3

Let us move to the end of our passage. “Then the Spirit lifted me up...” (Ezek 3:12a). Ezekiel is now coming full circle in Chs. 1-3. First, this verse returns to 2:1 and the Spirit setting him on his feet. What Spirit? As we saw before with Jerome, it is the Holy Spirit.

The NT does not make the Holy Spirit up. He is right there, breathing life into the pages of the OT. Indeed, he is found in person on many of them. Isaiah said, “But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them” (Isa 63:10). Such a verse is quite related to our story, as the very same rebellion is in mind in Ezekiel. God's Holy Spirit was in their midst, and had they listened to him, he would have been their help and shield.

Here, he is lifting Ezekiel up. In many places in the OT, the Holy Spirit empowers God's specially chosen servants for

great tasks. Joseph (Gen 41:38), Joshua (Num 27:18; Deut 34:9), and Gideon (Judg 6:34) are all equipped by the Spirit for divine service. In none of these cases is the Spirit indwelling as he does in after Pentecost. That doesn't mean those people weren't saved. The indwelling of the Spirit is the idea of sanctification, of purification of a holy place, such as the Temple. The temple is the place the Spirit "indwelt" in the OT. In the NT, God's people are the temple! You might recall in Ezek 2:2 that it says the Spirit "entered into me." Isn't this the same as at Pentecost? Well, no, because Pentecost is presented by Luke as being the first time whatever happened there happened. Yet, the Spirit entered into the prophet, but it was temporary and for the purpose of equipping him. Yet, he was still regenerated by faith as all OT saints were, when they believe the good news that Jesus is on the throne and forgives your sin. It's just that the place of the temple had not yet changed, and this is what will make the Glory leaving the temple in the next few chapters so significant and will actually set the stage for later in Ezekiel when he predicts Pentecost itself!⁵

If the Spirit lifting Ezekiel up takes us back to 2:2, the next words take us back even earlier. "... and I heard behind me the voice of a great earthquake: 'Blessed be the glory of

⁵ James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006), 15. See 42, 48ff. for the larger discussion.

the Lord from its place!” (3:12b). We are now jolted back into the heavenly scene of Ch. 1. It appears that one of the Living Creatures is talking (see 1:24). The sound is shattering, like an earthquake. He points Ezekiel to the “Glory.”

“Glory” is the word *kavod*. It means “heavy” or “weighty.” After Ezekiel had described “a likeness with a human appearance” on the throne (26), he then in parallel language described “the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (28). In 9:3-4 it will say, “The glory of the God of Israel had gone up ... and he called to the man clothed in linen [an angel] ... and the LORD said to him.” This shows you that the Glory of the LORD is the LORD. The Glory is a “he.” His name is the LORD. Specifically, Luke says that when Stephen died, “He saw the glory of God, that is Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55).⁶ John says Isaiah say Christ’s glory (John 12:41) and even that we have seen the Word’s glory “as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14). So Ezekiel 3:12 is reminding Ezekiel whom he is speaking to and the weightiness of the call that Christ is putting upon him now.⁷

⁶ Taking “and” epexegetically, cf. Ralph P. Martin, “A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5-11,” in *Recent Interpretation & in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 111 n. 3; Samuel Cooper Franklin Smith, “Stephen and Moses Parallels” (Liberty University, 2009), 48 n. 101; David Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC (B&H Publishing, 2010), 119.

⁷ For a short blog on this see Doug Van Dorn, “[Christ: The Glory of God: Christ in the Old Testament \(Part XI\)](#),” *Decablog* (Aug 8, 2014). For a longer dive, see the parallel chapter in my *Angel of the LORD* book.

The language continues to reverse itself, going back even earlier into Ch. 1. “It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, and the sound of a great earthquake” (13). The vision of God in the divine council is reiterated and finalized. Ezekiel has received a true commission, for he has stood in the council of the LORD.

And so our story completes, “The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me. And I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar canal, and I sat where they were dwelling. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days” (14-15). The last verse takes us back to the opening verses of the book, specifically locating the place where Ezekiel saw the vision by the canal as Tel-abib. And it is good news. The place means “Hill of Spring” or “Mound of Renewal” (*tel* = mound or hill, *aviv* = spring, renewal), an appropriate pause of grace just prior to the blast of law that is about to ensue. Curiously, the capital city of modern Israel Tel Aviv, founded in 1909 near Jaffa, was given this name as it reflected the Zionist vision of reviving Jewish life in land, as they saw parallels of the exiles in

Babylon with the Jewish people returning to build a new society in their ancestral land.

Ezekiel's reaction in **vs. 14**, where he goes “**in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me,**” reveals the weight of his prophetic call, his very human response to the daunting task of confronting a rebellious people with God's word. This bitterness, tempered by the Spirit's empowerment and the scroll's sweetness (**Ezek 3:3**), reflects the tension of embodying God's truth in a world that resists it. Yet, Ezekiel's obedience at Tel Abib shows **his commitment to God's voice over human opposition**. He will repent. He will obey. Unlike the false voices of Mani, NXIVM, Bethel Church, or even misguided Reformed zealots, who prioritize personal revelation, power, or pride over Scripture, Ezekiel's call urges us to anchor ourselves in God's word alone. As modern believers, we must internalize Scripture, like Ezekiel eating the scroll, letting the Holy Spirit make it sweet and empowering us to speak truth boldly, even when it stings, trusting that God's voice—clear, authoritative, and sufficient—will guide us through the noise of competing claims.

Returning to our opening question—how do we hear God’s true voice amidst today’s cacophony?—Ezekiel’s example points us in our day to *sola scriptura*, the Bible as our sole infallible rule (LBC 1.1), because Jesus is the final prophet. Mani’s esoteric dualism, NXIVM’s manipulative “enlightenment,” Bethel’s mystical excesses, and even confessional crusaders’ divisive zeal all fail the test of **Deut 18:18–22** and **Jer 23:16–22**, as they speak from human minds, rather than God’s council. Ezekiel, empowered by the Holy Spirit (**Ezek 2:2; 3:12**), stood in the divine presence, receiving God’s words directly, and so must we through Scripture, which is “**sweeter than honey**” (**Ps 19:10**) yet calls us to courageously confront sin. Let us, like Ezekiel, hear God’s voice in His word, reject false prophets who lead astray, and proclaim Christ—the ultimate “**Son of Man**” (**Ezek 2:1; John 1:14**)—whose Spirit equips us to live faithfully in a rebellious world, finding renewal at our own “Tel Abib” through obedience to His truth and true love for his people.

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