

Ezekiel 3:4-15—God Prepares and Equips Ezekiel

Memory Verse

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NKJV

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

God equips and strengthens Ezekiel in preparation for a difficult calling (3:4-15)

Before we look at the ultimate responsibility that God gave Ezekiel as God's watchman in the second half of chapter 3, we'll finish off the first half of the chapter where God tells Ezekiel exactly what kind of opposition that he will face, then promises that He will give Ezekiel the strength and endurance to outlast his critics. The same is true for us today.

Ezekiel 3:4-15 NKJV

⁴ Then 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 unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, ⁶ not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. ⁷ But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted. ⁸ Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. ⁹ Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house."

¹⁰ Moreover He said to me: "Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. ¹¹ And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse."

¹² Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a great thunderous voice: "Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place!" ¹³ I also heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, and a great thunderous noise. ¹⁴ So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. ¹⁵ Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

Why don't people listen to us? Because they won't listen to God.

Ezekiel 3:4-7 NKJV

Then 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 unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, ⁶ not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. ⁷ But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted.

v 4 **Then He said to me: “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them:** God repeats the call to ministry. Notice the word “go”, the same word Jesus used in the great commission. Also, “**speak My words**”, yet another reminder that we must only speak what God tells us to speak and not our own words.

v 5 **For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel:** Ezekiel’s calling was to His own people. This makes Ezekiel’s calling all the more difficult. It’s like trying to evangelise your own family—everyone knows you and no-one listens to you. It’s like Jesus when He was rejected by His own people in Nazareth (Mark 6:3). It’s the old saying, “familiarity breeds contempt”.

v 6 **not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you:** Just like the Assyrians in Nineveh responded to God’s call to repentance in Jonah’s day but the Israelites didn’t, so it would be in the days of Ezekiel.

““If I sent you to foreigners, they would listen,” God tells Ezekiel. “But I’m sending you to My people.” This indictment is still true today, for God’s people are sometimes less hungry and less receptive to God’s Word than even the heathen.” (Jon Courson)

It is sad that there is a famine for the word of God in many churches today. Many church people have little or no appetite for the word of God. Many have not even taken the time to read the bible all the way through. In today’s Laodacian church age (see Revelation 3:14-22), where we think that we have all we need, have no lack, and are rich, we neglect to feed on the words of God. Why? Our appetite is for the things of the world instead. However, the things of the world don’t satisfy, but for some that realisation may come too late.

Amos 8:11-12 NKJV

¹¹ “Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord God,
“That I will send a famine on the land,
Not a famine of bread,
Nor a thirst for water,
But of hearing the words of the Lord.

¹² They shall wander from sea to sea,
And from north to east;
They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord,
But shall not find it.

v 7 **But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted:** Here God repeats what He said in Ezekiel 2:4. God’s own people are willingly stubborn, deliberately setting their face to oppose God, refusing to change or repent, and not even feeling guilty about doing the wrong thing. This is the danger that we read about before in Hebrews 3:13, where these people of God are experiencing the worst possible consequence of sin—hearts that are hardened towards God. Beware, if we allow our hearts to become as hard toward God as the Israelites did, then, like He did with Israel, God will have to go to extreme measures to break us like He did with the Israelites. *The greater our pride than the greater our fall—and the more God’s loving discipline hurts Him and us.*

Ezekiel 3:8-9 NKJV

Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. ⁹ Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house."

v **9 Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead:** The nation of Israel, literally the "house of rebellion", were deeply committed to their path of resisting and rebelling against God. What God did was made Ezekiel even more committed to serving Him by speaking His message. "If they were hard in their rebellion, God would make him **harder than flint** in his courage and integrity" (David Guzik). No matter how stubborn unbelievers are in their sin, we must be even more stubborn in our obedience to God.

v **8 I have made your face strong:** Here God prepares and equips Ezekiel emotionally and intellectually to deal with the anticipated rejection of God's message.

"Make your face like adamant if their hearts are like adamant; if they are not ashamed to sin do not you be ashamed to warn them; if they are not ashamed of their unbelief, be not you ashamed of your faith in the divine testimony." (Spurgeon)

What we see in the book of Ezekiel is that Ezekiel actually did outlast his opponents. God gave Ezekiel the strength of character to continue to butt heads with those who refused to believe, to continue to preach to those who refused to respond, right to the very end of his life. We need to ask God for the strength so that we can have the same level of commitment, where we will never give up no matter how many setbacks we face, no matter how many time we are rejected, and no matter how difficult life gets.

Ezekiel 3:10-15 NKJV

Moreover He said to me: "Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. ¹¹ And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse."

¹² Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a great thunderous voice: "Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place!" ¹³ I also heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, and a great thunderous noise. ¹⁴ So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. ¹⁵ Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

v **10-11 Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. And go:** Here is the same formula as repeated twice before; the message must become a part of us before we can be sent. We must have soft hearts to hear and receive the word of God before we can effectively speak it.

v **11, 15 Go, get to the captives, to the children of your people... Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days:** "It's a good thing for the servant of God to be among his people, to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice, for he can better minister to them when he knows their hearts and feels their pain." (Wiersbe)

“This was a time of reflection and observation such as many great men of God experienced prior to launching their ministries. Those days of silence changed his attitude about his mission. He learned patience; he came to accept responsibility.” (Smith)

v 12-13 **“Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place!”**: We come back to the amazing vision of the awesome chariot with the glory of the LORD high above it. Again, we need the right perspective; we need to remember that we serve a big God. God is glorious, powerful, and majestic beyond measure. Man is tiny, puny, weak, dumb, and insignificant in comparison.

Never forget that we have constant access to the throne room of God where we can experience God’s glory and find all the grace and help we need for any situation.

v 14 **So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat [anger] of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me**: This is Ezekiel’s initial response—angry and bitter. You may remember the phrase that we get told when things don’t go our way, “well life wasn’t meant to be easy.”

“Perhaps Ezekiel was bitter at his lot as a captive, while others still lived and served in Jerusalem at the temple. Perhaps he was bitter at the difficulty of his call. Perhaps he was bitter at the sin and rebellion of the people of Israel. Whatever the exact cause, Ezekiel was bitter, angry, and stunned (v 15 **astonished**)” (David Guzik).

This is why it’s important to have the time of preparation that we just learned about, when Ezekiel sat for 7 days and didn’t say anything. It gave him time to absorb what God had said, and his attitude changed.

v 14 **So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away... but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me**: God is the source of our strength to overcome our feelings, objections, and fears. **God will work in us the desire both to will and do to His good pleasure** (see Philippians 2:13). Again, where God guides, God provides, and here we see God providing Ezekiel with the emotional fortitude as well as the desire to go ahead with a very difficult and (humanly speaking) unrewarding calling.

The Israelites might be very committed to their disobedience, but God made Ezekiel even more committed to loving and obeying Him—Ezekiel would stubbornly continue to follow the Lord even when all those around him stubbornly refused to do so—and this only because the hand of the Lord was strong upon him. Ezekiel is a great example of how God supernaturally put the desire for something in us and then gives us the strength and resources we need to accomplish His commands.

Philippians 2:13 NKJV

For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Philippians 2:13 NLT

For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

When God calls us to something we should feel inadequate; this is good. The earlier we understand that God’s commands can only be obeyed by first submitting to God and then seeking His power and wisdom, the less we will fall on our face as we try to do things by our own strength. If we think that we can do something on our own strength, then God will let us try, fail, and finally repent of our independence.

To finish today, I would like to step back and look at the big picture, to get an idea of why these things are happening, and apply these principles to ourselves. I will cover two 'big picture' concepts.

The big picture: God's discipline

As a general overview, in chapters 2 through 35, God through Ezekiel rebukes and disciplines His chosen people Israel because of their failure to respond to His goodness and kindness. In chapters 36 through 48, following this condemnation, God gives the people words of consolation, comfort, and encouragement, with many promises concerning their future. What is true for the nation of Israel is also true for us; no matter how bad our circumstances may be, no matter how badly we may sin, with God there is always hope.

It's important to keep the big picture in mind as we read through these chapters of rebuke and judgement towards Israel over the coming weeks. Just remember that we too can feel like God is hammering us as He disciplines us, smashing our pride as He mercifully humbles us. We will never enjoy the process of dying to self, but it is always for our good now, and for our future glory.

Without God's loving discipline, we would be carried away with our sin and our relationship with God would always be distant and strained, because of us growing more and more prideful and hardhearted towards God. Just imagine what a parent-child relationship would be like if the parents always let the children get and do what they wanted—the children would end up being spoilt brats and hating their parents. But when the parents exercise godly and wise discipline, it causes the relationship to heal and grow in love and trust. In effect the child is encouraged to do the things that will cause the relationship to grow, and discouraged to do the things that hurt the relationship. Another way of saying it is that a good parent makes life hard for their child when they are selfish, but rewards the child when they are humble and kind. This is what God does with us, and this is what we will see in the book of Ezekiel.

Hebrews 12:5-11 NKJV

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
⁶ For whom the Lord loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives."

⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ **Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.**

The big picture: God's grace and unconditional promises

Despite the nation of Israel's persistent sin and deep rebellion—literally even to this very day—they still have a glorious future awaiting them in the Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ and beyond. Why? **It's all because of God's grace—GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES.** Let's see some of the promises that God made to the children of Israel, starting right back with Abraham, and we'll see that despite Israel doing their best to rebel, God has always been faithful to keep His promises. I'll just focus on the promise of the physical land of Israel.

Genesis 12:1-3, 13:15, 15:18 NKJV

Now the Lord had said to Abram:

“Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father's house,
To a land that I will show you.

2 **I will** make you a great nation;

I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.

3 **I will** bless those who bless you,

And **I will** curse him who curses you;

And in you **all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**”

13:15 for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants **forever.**

15:18 On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying:

“**To your descendants I have given this land**, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates

Psalms 105:9-12 NKJV

The **covenant which [God] made** with Abraham,
And His oath to Isaac,

¹⁰ And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute,

To Israel as **an everlasting covenant**,

¹¹ Saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan

As the allotment of your inheritance,”

¹² When they were few in number,

Indeed very few, and strangers in it.

We know that God did bless Israel and bring them into the land, defeating their enemies and making them great among the nations. However, they disobeyed, and continued in their disobedience, so here in Ezekiel we see them being disciplined by God and taken away from their land. Does this mean that God has broken His promise? No. It is only a discipline. God promises to bring them back multiple times. We are extremely fortunate to live in these last days because we get to see so many fulfilled prophecies. For example:

Isaiah 11:11 NKJV

- ¹¹ It shall come to pass in that day
That the Lord shall set His hand again the second time
To recover the remnant of His people who are left,
From Assyria and Egypt,
From Pathros and Cush,
From Elam and Shinar,
From Hamath and the islands of the sea.
- ¹² He will set up a banner for the nations,
And will assemble the outcasts of Israel,
And gather together the dispersed of Judah
From the four corners of the earth.

Looking back we can see that God was faithful to bring the people back ***the first time*** after seventy years of captivity in Babylon.

Jeremiah 29:10 NKJV

For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place [Israel].

This was the first return of the exiles from Babylon. Then the nation rebelled against God again, culminating in their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah hundreds of years later. Jesus predicted that they would soon be defeated and scattered again, this time by the Romans, who would destroy the temple and the city.

Luke 21:5-6, 20-24 NKJV

Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, ⁶ “These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down.”

²⁰ “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. ²² For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. ²³ But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. ²⁴ **And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.**

This scripture was fulfilled in AD 70, when the Romans did indeed destroy the city and the temple and for nearly 2000 years the nation was scattered among the nations. But in 1948, God fulfilled Isaiah 11:11 (bringing His people back the second time), and also Isaiah 66:8 when Israel once again became a nation in literally only one day. There was a United Nations vote, and on the 14 May, 1948, Israel was reborn as a nation, after almost 2,000 years of being scattered among the nations. What we are seeing is the beginning of the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36 and 37. God has physically restored the nation of Israel, but their spiritual restoration is still future—it will happen by the end of the Tribulation. Again, we are privileged to live in these days where we see prophecy being fulfilled before our very eyes. Consider:

Ezekiel 36:24 NKJV

²⁴For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land.

This is still happening before our very eyes. Every year, thousands more Jews find their way back to Israel.

Ezekiel 36:34-35 NKJV

³⁴ The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. ³⁵ So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.'

Again we see prophecy fulfilled before our very eyes. Beginning around 1948, the Israelis began to transform the land from scorching deserts and disease ridden swamps to fertile fields, vineyards, orchards, and forests, becoming one of the largest exporters of fruits, flowers, and vegetables. Also, it is very true that the cities have been rebuilt, and they are most definitely fortified and inhabited—Israel has one of the most technologically advanced militaries in the world.

God keeps His promises. He said that He would bring them back into the land twice, and He has. He said that He would make the land fertile, and He has. He said that the land would be fortified, and it has. God said that He would bring back His people from all over the world, and they are. God said that He will change their hearts, and soon He will, this being one of the purposes of the Tribulation.

I have gone through all this to show that God's promises to Israel are unconditional. Israel enjoys their status as God's people, not because of anything that they have done to deserve it, but only because of God's grace. Consider:

Jeremiah 31:35-37 NLT paraphrase

It is the Lord who provides the sun to light the day
and the moon and stars to light the night,
and who stirs the sea into roaring waves.

His name is the Lord of Heaven's Armies,
and this is what he says:

³⁶ **"I am as likely to reject my people Israel
as I am to abolish the laws of nature!"**

³⁷ This is what the Lord says:

"Just as the heavens cannot be measured
and the foundations of the earth cannot be explored,
**so I will not consider casting them [Israel] away
for the evil they have done.
I, the Lord, have spoken!**

The main point here is that no-one deserves to receive anything from the Lord, but because God is kind, merciful, loving, and generous, He **gifts** us with blessings. He blessed the nation of Israel only because He promised to. Because of this, there was nothing that they could do that was so bad that God would eventually say, "You've gone too far, I can't forgive you anymore. Too bad, so sad, you are no longer My people!" . No, we see that God was and is faithful to keep all His promises to the nation of Israel. **Because God has chosen them as His people, they will always be His people, no matter how much they rebel** (This especially applies to Israel's national rejection of their Messiah at His first coming).

Children of God, take comfort, the same is true for what God promises the church; our adoption, eternal life, sharing God's glory, and our justification, sanctification, and glorification. Once we receive them, they are ours to keep. Because they were never earned, then we can never lose them. Both for Israel and the church, many of the promises we are given are UNCONDITIONAL—meaning that they have everything to do with God keeping His part of the bargain, but there's nothing for us to do. God has taken on all the responsibility to do what He promised to do. We receive everything simply because of God's amazing grace, His unmerited favour towards us.

Ephesians 2:1-9 NLT paraphrase

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ² You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. ³ All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

⁴ But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) ⁶ For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷ **So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.**

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. **And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.** ⁹ **Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.**

Just as God has been faithful to Israel, so He will be faithful to us, His church. One day soon He will faithfully keep His promise to come back and receive us unto Himself, that we may be with Him forever (John 14:1-3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). By rapturing us (snatching us from the earth), God will spare us His judgement that He will pour upon the earth during the Tribulation when He judges the unbelievers.

Personally, we should keep our hearts with all diligence (Proverbs 4:23), keeping them soft, so that God doesn't have to discipline us as much, and we can enjoy a deep and intimate relationship with Him. But even if we don't, God will be faithful to keep His promises to us.