

# Ezekiel's Responsibility

Ezekiel 33:7-16

SS Lesson for 11/23/2025

**Devotional Scriptures:** Ezekiel 3:17-21

## OUTLINE

### LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

*Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*Key Verse: Ezekiel 33:7*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

#### RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WATCHMEN (EZEK 33:7-9)

*Watchmen need to speak for God (7)*

Speak relying on the Holy Spirit (Matt 10:19-20)

Speak those things known about God (Acts 4:20)

Speak because God will provide boldness (Acts 18:9-11)

Speak because of believing in God (2 Cor 4:13)

*Watchmen need to warn the wicked (8)*

Warn the wicked about God's penalty for sins (Ezek 3:18-19)

Warn the wicked so they won't perish (Luke 13:3)

Warn the wicked so that their hearts can be purified (James 4:8)

Warn the wicked of examples in God's Word (1 Cor 10:11)

*Watchmen are delivered if obedient (9)*

Obedience leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)

Obedience leads to the praise of God by others (2 Cor 9:13)

Obedience leads to the reward of blessings (Deut 28:1-6)

Obedience brings the reward of freedom (James 1:25)

#### RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ISRAELITES (EZEK 33:10-16)

*Israelites must repent (10-11)*

Repent because the Kingdom of Heaven is near (Matt 4:17)

Repent for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38)

Repent so the refreshing will come from the Lord (Acts 3:19)

Repent and prove it by deeds (Acts 26:20)

*Israelites must not trust their works (12-13)*

Because no one can be justified by works (Acts 13:38-39)

Because no one can be declared righteous by works (Rom 3:19-20)

Because if by works, there would be no value in faith (Rom 4:13-14)

Because works of the law never made anyone perfect (Heb 7:18-19)

*Israelites can live if they turn from wickedness (14-16)*

Turn from evil ways so that God will show His mercy (Isa 55:7)

Turn from evil ways so that God can show His compassion (Jonah 3:10)

Turn from evil ways to prove their repentance (Acts 26:20)

Turn from evil ways by examining their ways (Lam 3:40)

### CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM THOMAS CONSTABLE

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

## Lesson Background and Key Verse

### Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

References to “the twelfth year” of the Babylonian exile bracket today’s lesson text of Ezekiel 33:7-16a (see Ezekiel 32:1, 17; 33:21). That exile happened in three stages, with deportations taking place in the years 605, 597, and 586 BC (2 Kings 24:1-25:21). “The twelfth year” dates from 597 BC (Ezekiel 1:2). Thus our lesson today takes us into the year of the fall of Jerusalem, in 586 BC. The residents of Judah who had been in exile already for 12 years and longer were about to experience another wave of their countrymen joining them in

captivity. Regarding literary context, the text for today's lesson is part of the larger unit of Ezekiel 33:1-20. This unit examines and illustrates Ezekiel's role as a prophet, the messages he is to convey, what mindset to expect from his audience, and how to respond to wrong thinking. Ezekiel 33:1-20 is something of a condensed version of Ezekiel 18, in which the prophet corrects an exaggerated view of group responsibility that sees its members as children suffering for the sins of their parents.

**Key Verse: Ezekiel 33:7**

*So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me*

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Responsibility of the Watchmen (Ezek 33:7-9)**

7 "So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me.

8 When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.

9 Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

### **Watchmen need to speak for God (7)**

*Speak relying on the Holy Spirit (Matt 10:19-20)*

19 But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

*Speak those things known about God (Acts 4:20)*

20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

*Speak because God will provide boldness (Acts 18:9-11)*

9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." 11 So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

*Speak because of believing in God (2 Cor 4:13)*

13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,

### **Watchmen need to warn the wicked (8)**

*Warn the wicked about God's penalty for sins (Ezek 3:18-19)*

18 When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 19 But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.

*Warn the wicked so they won't perish (Luke 13:3)*

3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

*Warn the wicked so that their hearts can be purified (James 4:8)*

8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

*Warn the wicked of examples in God's Word (1 Cor 10:11)*

11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

### **Watchmen are delivered if obedient (9)**

*Obedience leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)*

16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey, whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

*Obedience leads to the praise of God by others (2 Cor 9:13)*

13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

*Obedience leads to the reward of blessings (Deut 28:1-6)*

1 If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. 2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: 3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. 4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock, the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. 5 Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. 6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

*Obedience brings the reward of freedom (James 1:25)*

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does.

### **Responsibility of the Israelites (Ezek 33: 10-16)**

10 "Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: 'Thus you say, "If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?"'

11 Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

12 "Therefore you, O son of man, say to the children of your people: 'The righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression; as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall because of it in the day that he turns from his wickedness; nor shall the righteous be able to live because of his righteousness in the day that he sins.'

13 When I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, but he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered; but because of the iniquity that he has committed, he shall die.

14 Again, when I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right, 15 if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

16 None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right; he shall surely live.

### **Israelites must repent (10-11)**

*Repent because the Kingdom of Heaven is near (Matt 4:17)*

17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

*Repent for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38)*

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*Repent so the refreshing will come from the Lord (Acts 3:19)*

19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

*Repent and prove it by deeds (Acts 26:20)*

20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

### **Israelites must not trust their works (12-13)**

*Because no one can be justified by works (Acts 13:38-39)*

38 "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

*Because no one can be declared righteous by works (Rom 3:19-20)*

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

*Because if by works, there would be no value in faith (Rom 4:13-14)*

13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. 14 For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,

*Because works of the law never made anyone perfect (Heb 7:18-19)*

18 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless 19 (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

### **Israelites can live if they turn from wickedness (14-16)**

*Turn from evil ways so that God will show His mercy (Isa 55:7)*

7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

*Turn from evil ways so that God can show His compassion (Jonah 3:10)*

10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

*Turn from evil ways to prove their repentance (Acts 26:20)*

20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

*Turn from evil ways by examining their ways (Lam 3:40)*

40 Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.

# Conclusion and Other Thoughts

## *Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable*

### **Verses 1-4**

The Lord told Ezekiel to speak to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. He had not spoken messages concerning them for about three years (588-585 B.C.), since the Lord had shut his mouth (Ezekiel 24:25-27), though he had uttered five oracles against the nations during that time (Ezekiel 29:1-16; Ezekiel 30:20 to Ezekiel 32:32). He was now to tell them that if the Lord brought war on a land and the people of that land appointed a watchman for them, they would be responsible if they did not heed his warning.

Watchmen stood on the towers of walls in ancient cities and scanned the horizon for approaching enemies. If they saw one coming, they would blow their trumpet, usually a shophar (ram's horn), to warn the people who were farming the lands to take refuge in the city. The figure of blood being on one's head comes from sacrificial practice. The offerer placed his hands on the head of the victim symbolizing the transfer of guilt from the offerer to his substitute.

This part of Ezekiel's message of warning to the exiles is similar to Ezekiel 3:16-21. Yahweh re-commissioned Ezekiel to his prophetic task (cf. chs. 2-3).

"Now that Ezekiel's original ministry of judgment was completed, God appointed him as a 'watchman' for a second time. His message still stressed individual accountability and responsibility, but the focus was now on the Lord's restoration of Israel." [Note: Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 688.]

Since this message is undated, it may have come to Ezekiel about the same time as the previous two in chapter 32, namely, in the last month of 585 B.C. If so, Ezekiel received it about two months after God gave him the six messages recorded in Ezekiel 33:21 to Ezekiel 39:29 (cf. Ezekiel 33:21). Perhaps the writer inserted the present message in the text here because its strong encouragement to repent was more typical of Ezekiel's emphasis before news of Jerusalem's fall reached the exiles (Ezekiel 33:21) than it was of his emphasis after they received that news. When the exiles learned that Jerusalem had fallen, Ezekiel's messages changed. Before then he announced judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (chs. 4-24) and proclaimed several messages of judgment on the nations that opposed Israel (chs. 25-32). After that event his messages were more encouragements that God would restore Israel to her land (chs. 33-48).

There are only two dated prophecies after the fall of Jerusalem: Ezekiel 33:21 and Ezekiel 40:1. These texts introduce all the messages from Ezekiel 33:21 to Ezekiel 48:35, the end of the book. The message in Ezekiel 33:23-33 is an exception; it is a strong call to the Israelites to repent and to recommit to obeying the Mosaic Law. Alexander considered the message in Ezekiel 33:1-20 as the conclusion to the section of oracles against the nations (chs. 25-32). [Note: Alexander, "Ezekiel," p. 904.] Most commentators viewed this message as an introduction to the messages promising future blessings for Israel (chs. 33-48). Obviously it serves a transitional (janus) function in the book and looks both ways, backward and forward.

### **Verses 5-6**

The citizen would be responsible for his own death if he failed to heed the warning of the watchman. If he responded to the warning, he could save his life. But if the watchman failed to warn the people, he would be responsible for their deaths.

### **Verses 7-9**

God reminded Ezekiel that He had appointed him a watchman for the Israelites (cf. Ezekiel 3:17-21; Isaiah 21:6-9; Jeremiah 6:17). He was responsible to deliver the Lord's messages to His people. If Ezekiel failed to warn the people that they would die for their sins, God would hold him responsible for their deaths (cf. Genesis 4:9; Genesis 9:5). But if Ezekiel warned the sinners of the consequences of their iniquity and they disregarded his warning, they would die, but God would hold them, not Ezekiel, responsible (cf. Acts 20:26). Ezekiel had carried out his commission faithfully. Chapters 4-24 of this book contain the warnings that he delivered concerning the judgment that God intended to send on Judah and Jerusalem for the people's sins.

"Warning others of the consequences of judgment inherent in sin is never a popular assignment. Believers have a duty to be 'watchmen' who warn those who are in the world and are without God of the destructive nature of sin and its final irrevocable result-death and hell (Ezekiel 33:1-33). Our responsibility is to warn and proclaim as persuasively as possible, but how the message is received is beyond our control." [Note: Cooper, p. 294. Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Timothy 5:22; 1 Peter 4:17 to 1 Peter 5:2.]

### **Verses 10-11**

The Israelites seem to have taken on more personal responsibility for their sufferings than they had earlier (cf. ch. 18). They wondered how they could survive God's judgments. This is the first indication in the book that they were conscious of their own sins. The Lord affirmed again that He took no pleasure in putting people to death for their sins (cf. Ezekiel 18:23; Ezekiel 18:32). He much preferred for them to turn from their sin and live (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). He also appealed again to the people to do just that: to repent of their wicked ways and live (cf. Ezekiel 18:30-31).

"We must correctly distinguish regret, remorse, and true repentance. Regret is an activity of the mind; whenever we remember what we've done, we ask ourselves, 'Why did I do that?' Remorse includes both the heart and the mind, and we feel disgust and pain, but we don't change our ways. But true repentance includes the mind, the heart, and the will. We change our mind about our sins and agree with what God says about them; we abhor ourselves because of what we have done; and we deliberately turn from our sin and turn to the Lord for His mercy.

"When Peter remembered his sin of denying Christ, he repented and sought pardon; when Judas remembered his sin of betraying Christ, he experienced only remorse, and he went out and hanged himself." [Note: Wiersbe, p. 223.]

This part of Ezekiel's warning to the exiles is similar to Ezekiel 18:21-32.

### **Verses 12-13**

The right conduct of a usually righteous person would not exempt him from judgment if he sinned. Neither would the sinful conduct of a usually sinful person exempt him from forgiveness if he repented. The usually righteous person should not take God's promise of life for righteous living as a guarantee that he was exempt from punishment if he sinned. As in chapter 18, the issue here is not earning eternal salvation or losing it by the way one lives. It is rather the consequences of individual behavior in this life, which the Mosaic Law promised.

### **Verses 14-16**

God's warnings that the wicked would die because of their sinfulness also needed to be understood properly. They would die only if they failed to repent. If the wicked turned from his sins and obeyed the Mosaic Law, he would not die (prematurely). God would not hold his former sins against him. He would receive his life as a reward for his righteous conduct.

### **Verse 17**

The Jews were saying that the Lord was not dealing with them justly, but it was really their conduct and their thinking that were not right.

### **Verses 18-19**

If a normally righteous person abandoned his righteous lifestyle and pursued sin, he would die for it. But if a normally sinful person abandoned his sinful lifestyle and did what was right, he would live for it.

### **Verse 20**

The people persisted in claiming that the Lord's ways of dealing with them were not just. Yet Yahweh assured them that He would deal with each of them fairly, according to their own individual behavior. God does not blame one person for another person's sins.

In our day many people refuse to take personal responsibility for their lives and chose rather to blame someone else for the way they live (e.g. a parent, employer, teacher, abuser, the devil, God). We may not be responsible for the actions of others that have resulted in our present condition, but we are responsible for how we conduct ourselves in our present condition.

This message repeats God's appointment of Ezekiel as a watchman over Israel (ch. 3) and His assurance of personal responsibility (chs. 3 and 18). Evidently the exiles had difficulty accepting this revelation. They tended to view Ezekiel as an entertainer (Ezekiel 33:30-32) and God as unfair.

### **Verse 21**

On the fifth day of the tenth month of the twelfth year of the Jews' exile, namely, on January 19, 585 B.C., word reached the exiles from refugees who had come from Jerusalem. [Note: Parker and Dubberstein, p. 28.] They announced that Jerusalem had fallen to Nebuchadnezzar. The siege of Jerusalem began on the tenth month, the tenth day, and the ninth year of King Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 25:1; 588 B.C.). The city fell on the fourth month, the ninth day, and the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 25:2-7; 586 B.C.). Thus the siege lasted 18 months. The news of Jerusalem's fall reached the exiles in Babylon about five months after the city fell in 586 B.C. According to one method of reckoning, it took 18 months for news of Jerusalem's fall to reach the exiles, but it seems more probable that it took about five months, which was apparently the normal time it took to make this trip (cf. Ezra 7:6-9). [Note: See the commentators for a more detailed study of the problem.]

*(Adapted from URL:<https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/eng/dcc/ezekiel-33.html>)*

### **Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

As members of the new covenant, today we continue to ponder the connection between sin and suffering for those living under the old covenant (compare Job 21:19; Luke 13:1-5; John 9:2). Righteous people do indeed suffer because of realities beyond their control. But today's lesson says that the path of the righteous is the one to travel nonetheless. Walking the path of the wicked results in destruction. Considering God's charge to Ezekiel to be a watchman, how might we live out a watchman role? At the outset, it is important to understand that Ezekiel received his call to serve as a prophetic watchman by direct revelation from God. Ezekiel filled this role at a particular time in history, to a particular group of people, in ways that were relevant to his time, place, and audience. We are not prophets in the same sense that Ezekiel was. Those who claim today to be commissioned by God to be prophets in the sense of being able to foretell the future may well be proven wrong (Deuteronomy 18:22; Hebrews 1:1-2). Even so, there are opportunities for us to speak a watchman's words of warning and wisdom to those around us. God doesn't desire that anyone should perish (2 Peter 3:9). He punishes disobedience justly, but he is also gracious, merciful, and patient. He invites sinners to repent and turn from their wicked ways to find life in his Son. We have this good news to proclaim! Moreover, it is not up to us whether people heed our words. Like Ezekiel, our responsibility is to tell the story of the good news of the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20). Whether that good news is accepted or rejected is not within our control. However, our own faithfulness in proclaiming it is.