

# When You Had No Idea How Bad It Was

*October 9, 2022*

## Lesson Summary

### ***Main Passages***

Ezekiel 3:1-15

### ***Session Outline***

1. Taking in the Word (Ezekiel 3:1-4)
2. Strong for the Call (Ezekiel 3:5-11)
3. Overwhelmed (Ezekiel 3:12-15)

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### ***Theological Theme***

Ezekiel spoke God's truth to the people who rebelled against the Lord and were taken captive as a result. God warned that the people He wanted Ezekiel to speak to wouldn't listen, but he was to obey anyway.



## Leader Guide

# When You Had No Idea How Bad It Was

### Introduction

Health and nutrition are big business. According to the Global Wellness Institute in 2019 this sector was a little over \$900 billion. In 2020 it grew to just over \$940 billion.<sup>1</sup> Though we have always known that our intake affects our output, many people have grown more serious and specific about exactly what they are taking into their bodies and how it affects the way they live. This is bigger than a short-lived New Year’s resolution for many people.

With the amount of knowledge at our fingertips, many are interested in how to improve and protect their health and wellness. Plenty of coaches or influencers can give us information on what we can do to achieve our fitness, wellness, weight loss, or general health goals. Many who want to see changes in their health and fitness levels look for someone who is like them but further along in their progress. Insider perspective from a person who can relate to us is valuable.

- ❓ Why do you think the health and wellness industry is so huge?
- ❓ Why is it helpful to receive advice from someone in a situation that is like yours when seeking to improve your health or wellness? How is this true in other situations as well?

### Session Summary

Ezekiel was God’s voice to His people while they were exiles in Babylon. He gave an insider’s perspective on the situation while Jeremiah—who wrote from Jerusalem—and Daniel—who was taken into exile in the first siege and in a position of leadership in the court—also spoke for the Lord. Ezekiel is considered an apocalyptic book as it “lifts the veil” or shares a “revelation” of what is coming. Ezekiel was tasked with helping the Israelites understand why they were in exile, that they would be there a while, that they should keep looking to God, and that there was hope.

The visions Ezekiel received from the Lord were tough for him to handle. The Israelites were his people. He was taken into captivity with them in the second siege on Jerusalem, and he lived beside them in exile. He witnessed the suffering and devastation the people experienced. It was their rebellion against the Lord that caused severe punishment, and Ezekiel was called to remind them of the truth. He also challenged them to turn their eyes toward the Lord and find their hope in Him.

Ezekiel loved his brothers and sisters and, as God revealed more in the visions, was deeply distressed over the suffering they would experience. Even though the Lord warned him that the people would not listen to and receive the truth well, Ezekiel still chose to obey. He likely felt ill-equipped to represent the Lord, but God continued to prepare and empower Ezekiel to obey. Ezekiel is a reminder that regardless of how it is received, our job as Christ followers is to be obedient to the tasks the Lord puts before us. We can trust Him with the results.

## 1. Taking in the Word (Ezekiel 3:1-4)

Ezekiel was a prophet to the community of Israelites in captivity and the recipient of God's words. The Lord started His conversation in a vision to Ezekiel with an instruction to eat. The vision was of a scroll filled on both sides being offered to Ezekiel. As he prepared to speak God's words to the people, Ezekiel needed to take them in himself. This was more involved and personal than just hearing the words or reading the words. God was making it clear that His words are to be taken in like food for the soul, digested into the body, and used as fuel for action.

This is a life changing concept that many have missed. We have churches full of people who have filled their heads with knowledge, yet they have missed the step of using it as fuel for the way they live their daily lives. By instructing Ezekiel to eat the scroll, the Lord was changing the expectations for what the Word was to do. Middle Eastern culture commonly uses this approach to Scripture, but it is a new process for the Western world we live in. Think about the difference you can experience when you think about the picture of "eating Scripture." Instead of reading the Word, you feast on it. It becomes a part of you just as food does. The body takes the food you eat and pulls out what it can use as fuel. That fuel then becomes energy that supplies the power you need to do the things you do. Ezekiel was told to take in the Word and gain strength for the task ahead.



How is it different for you to think about using God's Word as "food" instead of mere information?


After eating the scroll, Ezekiel was then to go and speak to the House of Israel. This was the next step of his journey and ours. Once the Word is eaten and ingested, it becomes fuel for us to speak and do the things God calls us to. As a leader, Ezekiel needed to recognize that the Word was for him first. He needed to hear it, understand it, eat it, be fueled by it, and apply it. Then he would be able to speak it most effectively to the people God sent him to. If you have ever been disappointed with your efforts to share truth from God's Word, then maybe you can take a seat at Ezekiel's table. When you have taken in the Word, been fueled by it, and applied it to your own life, you will share about it more effectively to the people around you. Think about the best Bible teachers you've learned from. What was different about the way they taught? Did they have passion for the subject? Were they speaking from experience and shared personal application? Whatever made them stand out as powerful leaders or teachers, the truth is that we all will be more effective when we do what Ezekiel did with the Word.



How have you seen the truth that we are more effective sharing the Word when we have taken it in as a feast and been changed by it?


The Lord did not just want Ezekiel to get a small taste of the scroll, the Word. He told him to fill his stomach. That's a big difference than just take a bite of the scroll as a taste. How often do we fill up on the Word? Is it daily fuel for you or are you just getting "sample bites" here and there? Is there even room for you to take in more of the Word, or are you in the habit of filling up on other things that take up space in your heart and life so that you are limited on how much Scripture you can ingest? If Ezekiel was going to eat up the scroll until his belly was full, then he couldn't also consume all that the world had to offer; there wouldn't be enough room for what he truly needed as his strength. The scroll, the Word of God, strengthened him for the nearly impossible task he faced. Finding strength in anything else would not cut it.

Ezekiel obeyed the Lord and ate the scroll. He found it to be sweet like honey. There are other places in Scripture where God's Word is compared to honey or sweet things. The implication is that honey is sweet and satisfying just as the Word of God is to the believer. We should eat it and be satisfied by what we take in. If that is not the case, then it's possible that our taste buds have become distorted by the world, and we have fed our appetites for the wrong things so much that our souls crave what feeds the flesh instead of the Spirit in us. The sad thing is that when our appetite is not for the things of the Lord, we will not live as He desires. That is what got the Israelites into their terrible situation in captivity. The good news is that even if your "taste" is currently off, when you feed your soul with the right things, you can develop a taste for Scripture and find yourself living in obedience to the Lord.

 Application: What do you need to do differently to find strength in God's Word over other things?


## 2. Strong for the Call (Ezekiel 3:5-11)

God reaffirmed His call on Ezekiel to be His prophet to the people and told him to go and speak the message given to him. A prophet's role was to speak for God and not be silent. The message a prophet spoke contained words from God, not the prophet's own words or thoughts. This is also the call of God for Christians today. We are to speak His Word to the people in our lives. Those we encounter should hear from us about who God is and what He wants them to know. Just as Ezekiel spoke words of hope to the exiles in Babylon, we are surrounded by people in captivity with no hope. Our main calling is to share the hope we have in Christ and to let others know they are loved even as they feel bound up by their own bad choices.

 How might we describe people living in "exile" today? What do they share with the Israelites in Ezekiel's time?

Notice how God described the people He was sending Ezekiel to speak to. He was primarily called to represent God to the Jewish people—these were his own people. Sometimes it is harder to share with your own people. Though they speak the same language and have the same traditions, it can be difficult to give them God's Word. God warned Ezekiel that although the people could understand the words he said, they would struggle to listen to him because it went against the way they lived. Have you ever had a similar experience with God's Word? Maybe you tried to share something that you have recently learned with people close to you, but they refused to accept what you had to say. Because Scripture is living, active, and sharply applicable, those living in sin may be extremely resistant to hearing or receiving the truth. That is what Ezekiel faced.

By calling the people out for being hardheaded and stubborn hearted, God stressed the difficulty of the assignment He gave Ezekiel. This also emphasized how committed the Israelites were to their rebellion and rejection of God. It was a sad state for them to continue in, and yet they did not show any signs of repentance. The Lord wanted Ezekiel to be clear that the people would not welcome the message, but it was still his task.

 Have you ever tried to share with someone who was resistant to hearing the truth as Ezekiel did? Describe that experience.

After warning Ezekiel how tough it would be, God described how He was preparing Ezekiel for the task. The Lord promised Ezekiel that he would be strengthened and committed to a greater level than the people were entrenched in their rebellion. God told Ezekiel that He would equip him emotionally and intellectually to handle the difficult assignment. God made Ezekiel's head and heart as hard as the people he would come up against. It was as if God was saying, "If the people are not ashamed of their rebellion, then you, Ezekiel, will be just as unashamed to confront them in that sin." God was preparing Ezekiel to withstand any response to his speaking truth to the people.

God does not promise that His message will be received well. He just calls us to do what Ezekiel did—receive the message ourselves and share it with others. He sent Ezekiel to the people. There is power and opportunity when you live in community with others. Ezekiel needed to be with the ones he was going to speak to so he could know what they were dealing with. He could be with them as they experienced the ups and downs of life, and in doing so, he would earn the right to be heard by them. Regardless, his job was to speak God's words to them no matter how they might be received. It is always important to receive God's Word personally then be obedient in sharing it as we have opportunity.



Application: How does living in community help you share the message of truth as you are called to?

### 3. Overwhelmed (Ezekiel 3:12-15)

After issuing a difficult assignment and warning about its likely reception, Ezekiel needed to be reminded of who was giving the instructions and who he served. Reminding Ezekiel of the vision he had received already boosted his faith and stressed the power of God. It is important to have strong faith when God instructs you to do something tough and unpopular.



What about God inspires the most faith and confidence in you?

It is not exactly clear why the Lord lifted Ezekiel up or what was happening as the vision wrapped up. Ezekiel describing himself as bitter in that moment could have had to do with the fact that once the vision was over, he was to start the hard assignment ahead of him. Maybe it was because he was frustrated with the Israelites' rebellion. Whatever caused his bitterness, Ezekiel clearly felt the hand of the Lord on him, and that made the difference.




When have you felt the power of the Lord on you, and what difference did it make in your obedience?

#### Stunned Silence




After this encounter with the Lord, the divine Spirit led Ezekiel to the exilic community at Tel Abib in Babylon, where he sat in stunned silence for a week. The Lord then called him to serve as a watchman who would be responsible for warning his audience of God's impending judgment. Ezekiel was to warn both the wicked and the righteous who were tempted to backslide. If he failed to do so, their blood would be on his head.

Ezekiel did what God told him. He went to the people in captivity and sat among them. Scripture tells us that he was astonished and overwhelmed. This prophet of God was speechless at what he saw and experienced through the hand of the Lord on his life. It can be overwhelming to realize God wants to use us in His plans for the world. Ezekiel took seven days to prepare for the calling ahead of him.

God's call in the life of a believer can be overwhelming at times. There is no shortage of people throughout history who have been stunned, shocked, and even speechless at the opportunities they have to make an impact on the world. Like Ezekiel we need to be open to what God wants to do in us and through us. Our hearts should care enough about the plight of the people around us that we are vulnerable to the heartache that comes from loving them deeply. We can be confident the Lord will provide the strength we need, and we can count on Him in life's most difficult moments.

-  Application: When was the last time you were overwhelmed by the hand of God in your life? How did it change you?

## Conclusion

-  How will you make it a practice to “eat the Word” on a more regular basis? What have you filled up on instead of the Word of God?
-  What difficult thing is God calling you to do? What do you need to do differently to obey the Lord right now?
-  How are you vulnerable and heartbroken for the plight of others? How do you need to respond?

## Prayer of Response

*Praise the Lord for the ways He prepares you for what He calls you to do. Offer yourself up to His service and ask for the courage to obey even the hard things. Confess ways you have had a hard heart and refused to be vulnerable to the plight of others.*

## Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Ezekiel* by Landon Dowden
- *Be Reverent* by Warren Wiersbe
- *The Message of Ezekiel* by Christopher Wright

# Disciples Multiplying Disciples





## For Next Week

### Session Title

- When the City Doesn't Love You Back

### Main Passages

- Luke 19:35-44

### Session Outline

1. Entering Jerusalem (Luke 19:35-40)
2. Mourning over the City (Luke 19:41-42)
3. Coming Destruction (Luke 19:43-44)

### Memorize

*He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find here. Eat this scroll, then go and speak to the house of Israel."*

- Ezekiel 3:1

# Historical Context of Ezekiel

## Purpose

The message of the book revolves around a pivotal event in the history of Israel—the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Prior to the announcement of Jerusalem’s fall, Ezekiel’s message was characterized by judgment. In his scathing review of Israelite history, Ezekiel exposed the nation’s moral depravity and absence of spiritual concern (2:1–8; 8:7–18; 13:1–23; 17:1–21; 20:1–32). After the destruction of Jerusalem was complete and the nation was in exile, his message changed. He turned to a proclamation of hope, which is what the people then needed most. God would provide a new heart and a new spirit to enable the people to be faithful and avoid a future judgment (11:17–20; 36:26–28). The Lord would establish a new temple (chaps. 40–48) and a new way of worship for the people once they were restored.

## Author

There is sufficient reason for maintaining that the prophet Ezekiel composed the book of Ezekiel in Babylon. The work demonstrates such homogeneity and literary coherence that it is reasonable to conclude that all editorial work was carried out by a single person, the prophet himself.

The inclusion of historical dates at the beginning of many of the oracles and prophecies in Ezekiel is another important unifying factor. The book is one of the most chronologically ordered books of the Bible. Thirteen times a passage is introduced by an indication of time. The common point of orientation for the dates given in Ezekiel is the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah in 598/597 BC.

The occurrence of visions throughout the book (chaps. 1; 8–11; 40–48) is another strong argument in favor of its overall unity. Finally, stylistic features throughout the book strengthen the unity argument.

## Setting

Ezekiel, son of Buzi, was among the approximately ten thousand citizens of Judah deported to Babylon when King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem in 598/597 BC (2Kg 24:10–17). His prophetic call came to him five years later (the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile), in 593 BC. He received his call at the age of thirty (1:1), the year he should have begun his duties as a priest (Nm 4:3). The last dated oracle in the book occurs in the twenty-seventh year of King Jehoiachin (29:17), thus indicating that Ezekiel’s ministry lasted twenty-two or twenty-three years. The prophet lived during one of the greatest crises in Israel’s history—the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, plus the exile of Judah’s leading citizens to Babylon.

## Special Features

The book of Ezekiel contains the divinely inspired prophecies of the prophet of the same name. These prophecies consist of oracles in the first person, giving the reader a sense of access to Ezekiel’s private memoirs. Written primarily to the exiles in Babylon, the prophecies equally emphasize judgment of sins and the promise of hope and restoration.

## Extended Commentary

### Ezekiel 3:1-15

3:1 To eat this scroll signifies devouring the words written on it. After Ezekiel consumed the scroll, he would proclaim the words to the people.

3:2–3 The words as sweet as honey show that an encounter with the Word of God is a pleasant experience (Ps 19:10; 119:103).

3:4–5 The phrase unintelligible speech or a difficult language reminds us of Moses's excuses in Ex 4:10 (cp. Is 33:19).

3:6 Jonah was sent to such a people, and they listened to him.

3:7 God warned Moses that Pharaoh would not listen to him (Ex 3:19). God told Isaiah that his prophetic ministry would only show the spiritual insensitivity of a corrupted people (Is 6:9–10). The refusal-to-listen theme is also prominent in Jeremiah (Jr 3:25; 7:13; 9:13; 11:8; 16:12; 17:23; 18:10; 19:15; 22:5; 25:3–4, 7). Jesus's comment that a prophet receives honor everywhere but his hometown (Mt 13:57) parallels Ezekiel's experience. Even when there was little hope of bringing about repentance, God still sent prophets so the people would realize that his word had been among them.

3:8–9 The hardness of their faces portrayed the hardness of their will against the word and will of God. But Ezekiel would be fully equipped to deal with them.

3:10–14 Ezekiel left in bitterness and in an angry spirit because of the rebelliousness of the people.

3:15 In the Akkadian language, the phrase Tel-abib literally means “mound of the flood,” indicating that the location was well known as a ruined site. Mourning for the dead lasted seven days (Gn 50:10; Jb 2:13). The consecration ceremony for admission into the priesthood, which Ezekiel had anticipated for himself before the exile, also lasted seven days (Lv 8:33).<sup>2</sup>

## References

1. “Statistics & Facts.” Global Wellness Institute, January 27, 2022. <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/press-room/statistics-and-facts/>.
2. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).

## Author Bio

### Landon Dowden (Exalting Jesus in Ezekiel)

Landon Dowden is the Lead Pastor at The Church at Trace Crossing, Tupelo, Mississippi. With the firm belief that the Gospel is the only hope for aligning our lives with God's Word, Landon is firmly committed to verse by verse exposition of the Bible, because "nothing is better for God's people than God's Word." Landon yielded his own life to Christ at the age of eight while growing up in Louisiana. After finishing with a Bachelor's degree from Louisiana State University, Landon furthered his studies with three graduate-level degrees (Master of Divinity, Master of Theology & Doctorate of Philosophy) at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans, LA. He is married to Tara and father to Arabella, Adalaide, Adoniram & Alastair. Leading and shepherding his family is a great priority to Landon, as is making disciples through preaching, mentoring, biblical counseling, and through living life together in the power of the Gospel.

### Warren Wiersbe (Be Reverent)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of Back to the Bible, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as "the pastor's pastor." He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

### Christopher Wright (The Message of Ezekiel)

Christopher J. H. Wright (PhD, Cambridge) is international ministries director of the Langham Partnership and the author of several books, including *The Mission of God*, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, and *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*.