EZEKIEL

Chapter 3

**And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel.”  2 So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. 3 Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. 4 He then said to me: “Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them.  5 You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel—  6 not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you.  7 But the house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate.  8 But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are.  9 I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house.” 10 And he said to me, “Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you.  11 Go now to your countrymen in exile and speak to them. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says,’ whether they listen or fail to listen.” 12 Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a loud rumbling sound—May the glory of the LORD be praised in his dwelling place!—  13 the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against each other and the sound of the wheels beside them, a loud rumbling sound.  14 The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the LORD upon me.  15 I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Abib near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days—overwhelmed.**

**3:1** EAT THIS SCROLL – The command for Ezekiel to “eat” the scroll in 2:8 is repeated two more times in 3:1, and it will be expanded in 3:3. All that repetition, plus the fact that in this verse the object (“whatever you receive”) is placed first in the chiastic structure of the double command to “eat,” has been taken to imply that Ezekiel was reluctant to eat something so unappetizing; perhaps he was resisting. The supposition is not implausible. Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah voiced reservations when they were called into the ministry (Ex 3:11; 4:10; Is 6:5; Jer 1:6–7). But Ezekiel does not raise any explicit objection to God’s call and command to eat. A comparable double command, with double obedience by Ezekiel, occurs in Ezekiel 37, when the prophet prophesies to the dry bones (37:4, 7, 9–10). (CC)

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and *inwardly digest* them, that by patience and comfort of Thy holy Word we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. (TLH) (CC)

The part of the collect about inwardly digesting the Scriptures is based on this episode in Ezekiel. We might compare Ezekiel’s ingestion and digestion of the Word in scroll form to the way in which in the Lord’s Supper the Word made flesh is received by mouth and ingested to permeate the body of the communicant, who is a member of Christ’s one body (1 Cor 10:16–17). (CC)

The double command to “eat” in 3:1 is followed in virtually the same breath by a reiteration of the command to preach to an apostate people (“then go, speak to the house of Israel”). The extraordinary experience was not an end in itself, but a prerequisite for ministry. (CC)

**3:3** EAT THIS SCROLL – What is really surprising, especially in the light of all these near parallels (and even more so in light of the congenital skepticism of higher criticism), is the virtual unanimity of commentators of every stripe that the eating of the scroll by Ezekiel should be taken literally. And the construal of the act’s meaning varies little either: God’s message must permeate even the prophet’s bones and marrow, as it were, so that he preaches the message with every fiber of his being. His consumption of the divine Word causes a sort of inner reformation that enables him to accept and internalize even the strangest and harshest prophecies given to him, and then also to proclaim them as part of God’s overarching design of love. In the life of every Christian, one might compare some of our classical hymns: “What God Ordains Is Always Good,” “God’s Time Is the Best Time,” and so on. (CC)

FILL YOUR STOMACH – The causative forms of “eat” in these verses perhaps imply a supernaturally aided act. The picturesque reiteration of the command in 3:3 involving “stomach” and “innards” implies that Ezekiel’s entire body is to be permeated with the ingested divine Word. Faith is never a matter of either “head” (intellect) or “heart” (spiritual disposition) alone, but of both. That principle applies to a called messenger of the Word in a special way, and in Ezekiel that point is made most dramatically: the scroll of God’s Word enters through his mouth (head) and is to be digested in his innards (in the vicinity of his heart). The objective Word, coming to him entirely from outside himself, must be “internalized.” Even his physical life is to be grasped, owned by the Word. One immediately thinks of the many subsequent action prophecies of Ezekiel (especially in chapters 4–5) that involve his body. Since hostility and rejection were also his lot, one might also invoke a certain “theology of the cross” here. (CC)

*sweet as honey in my mouth.* What Jeremiah experienced emotionally (Jer 15:16) was experienced by Ezekiel in a more sensory way: Words from God are sweet to the taste (see Ps 19:10; 119:103)—even when their content is bitter (see Rev 10:9–10). (CSB)

The sweet taste of the strange food has been allegorized broadly into the sweetness of the Gospel, or even the promise of salvation after the announcement of judgment. But Eichrodt is basically on target in his explanation “that it points to our experience that even strange and apparently unintelligible demands on the part of God, when they are once fulfilled by us, bestow an inward satisfaction which takes away all their bitterness.” The Word will give Ezekiel spiritual joy in his ministry despite the divine mandate to preach searing Law (especially in chapters 4–24) as well as comforting Gospel (especially chapters 33–48). (CC)

**3:4** Ezek 3:4–11 is a unit that basically repeats 2:3–7, although heightening virtually every detail. Ingesting the scroll (3:1–3) has prepared Ezekiel interiorly for his task, and the accent in these verses is on his exterior preparation. He will be supplied with God’s very words (3:4). In comparison with 2:3, the stress shifts from Yahweh’s appointment to Ezekiel’s responsibility to be absolutely obedient in delivering the divine Word to Israel. (CC)

**3:5** Ezekiel is not to be a “foreign missionary” to peoples who speak languages unintelligible to the prophet, nor is he even to have a cross-cultural ministry. He is to minister to his own people, who have the same language and culture as he does. They will have no difficulty understanding his tongue. If they refuse to listen, it will be due to their rebellious sinful nature. (CC)

**3:6** *Surely if I had sent you to them.* Jesus spoke similar words to Israel (see Mt 11:21). (CSB)

The new thought in this verse uses a contrary-to-fact assertion: if Ezekiel had been sent to some other people besides Israel, they would have listened. In 3:5, the foreign “people” mentioned would most likely be the Babylonians, among whom the Israelites had been forced to live. In 3:6 one would probably think of any of the various other ethnic groups who had also been exiled to the vicinity of Nippur. The best OT example of the situation God describes is the people of Nineveh, who had repented at Jonah’s preaching (despite that prophet’s own initial refusal to preach). This point is probably also implicit in the oracles to the other nations, found in virtually all the prophetic books (including Ezekiel 25–32), although the situation is more complicated there. At the very least, other nations are subject to God’s judgment because they have not obeyed “natural law,” the law written in their hearts (especially evident in Amos 1–2; cf. Rom 2:12–15). Jesus makes a similar point, asserting that Tyre and Sidon, even Sodom, would have responded better to his mighty works than did the Jewish communities at Bethsaida, Capernaum, and Chorazin (Mt 11:20–24). (CC)

**3:7** This dismal forecast of Ezekiel’s failure is obviously intended as comfort to Ezekiel. The present, continuing refusal of Israel to listen to God (“they are not willing to listen to me,” with the negated participle אֹבִ֖ים) guarantees their future refusal to listen to God’s prophet (“Israel will not be willing to listen to you,” with the negated imperfect יֹאבוּ֨). “Convince a man against his will, he’s of the same opinion still” applies with double force to repentance and conversion, which can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who works through the Word. No merely human devices or persuasive techniques will work. “No one is so deaf as someone who does not want to hear.” (CC)

“The whole house of Israel” appears to include both past generations and the present one, as we saw already in 2:3–4 and as Israel is presented throughout the book. There had never been a time in Israel’s existence when it had not been refractory and confrontational. The people’s behavior is both an old family tradition (they are a “house”) and also one that they almost spontaneously reaffirm themselves. (CC)

Their rejection is not of Ezekiel personally, but of the one who sent him, just as Yahweh said to Samuel in 1 Sam 8:7. It is a refrain heard throughout Scripture. So Jesus expressed “*the Christological principle of representation* according to which the emissaries bear in themselves the person of Christ”: (CC)

The one who listens to you listens to me, and the one who rejects you rejects me. But the one who rejects me rejects the one who sent me. (Lk 10:16 and parallels)

**3:8** Such adamancy on the part of the people requires a counter-adamancy. Compare Jeremiah’s call: “I make you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar and bronze walls against all the land” (Jer 1:18). In Jeremiah some words of comfort accompany the promise of the requisite fortitude for the task. Ezek 3:8 should not be construed to imply some grim insensitivity on Ezekiel’s part, although the personalities of the two prophets are a study in contrasts. Jeremiah is given to expressing his emotions and pathos, while Ezekiel is reserved and resolute, even when his wife dies (Ezekiel 24). God still uses “all sorts and conditions of men” in the ministry. (CC)

**3:9** *I will make your forehead like the hardest stone.* Strength and courage were necessary equipment for a prophet, especially when preaching judgment. Jeremiah was similarly equipped (see Jer 1:18). (CSB)

The diamond-hard countenance given Ezekiel (3:7–9) is apparently a deliberate play on Ezekiel’s name. Three times in 3:8–9 the Hebrew adjective חָזָק, “strong,” applies to Ezekiel, and his name is compounded of that same root (“God will strengthen”; see the textual note on it in 1:3). Ezekiel’s whole life, as well as his name, is to be an action prophecy, a type (in the theological sense) of the hard words of judgment he has to speak. (CC)

**3:10** *listen carefully and take to heart.* The prophet is to stand in marked contrast to the people, who do not listen. (CSB)

A new direct address to the prophet introduces this final short speech at the end of Ezekiel’s commissioning. Much of it is a reiteration of what has been said earlier. In a straightforward explanation of the implication of the eating of the scroll, Yahweh insists that his prophet listen to his words (unlike Israel, which heard but did not listen) and transmit his words verbatim to Israel, regardless of their reaction. As Zimmerli points out, the Hebrew imperfect (“I will speak”) refers not just to past revelations, but indicates that Ezekiel must continue to be a listener and pass on God’s future messages. Ezekiel conveys only what he has received, and he is answerable to God only for delivering the Word faithfully. As such he is a model for the ministry of all God’s servants. (CC)

**3:11** *Go now to your countrymen in exile.* Ezekiel’s ministry was to the exilic community, most of whom refused to believe that God would abandon Jerusalem and the temple. After the fall of Jerusalem, therefore, they were strongly inclined to despair. (CSB)

The new element in 3:11 is that the “sons of Israel” (2:3) to whom the prophet shall preach are specified for the first time as “the exiles”—not those still left in Canaan who had escaped this deportation. Ezekiel is to have no part in “decrying absentees from church to the congregation at hand.” God is not only more specific, but also more intimate. The prophet must preach to “the sons of your people,” bound to the same Father by the covenant and its promises, as in the full sense of the NT κοινωνία, “the communion of saints,” initiation into which comes in the Sacrament of Baptism. (CC)

**3:12-15** A new paragraph (3:12–15) begins here, which is a resumption of the narrative begun in 1:1. There are many echoes of earlier parts of the story at the same time that the prophet’s initiatory encounter with Yahweh is concluded. (CC)

The Spirit who had earlier empowered him to stand (2:1–2; and later, 3:24) now transports him. The last part of 3:12 is a spontaneous doxological salute to the departing Glory (כָּבוֹד), presumably uttered by heavenly, angelic creatures, and conceivably joined by the prophet himself (although it would be Ezekiel’s only utterance in chapters 1–3). The closest parallels to Ezek 3:12 are Rev 5:8–14 and Rev 7:9–12, where the four living creatures (who seem to be the same ones as in Ezekiel’s vision) around God’s throne in heaven, along with other angels and the elders (saints in glory), sing doxological praises to God and the Lamb. Based on those NT parallels, the four living creatures (and/or other unnamed angelic beings) most likely are the ones who utter the doxology in Ezek 3:12. (CC)

In 1:28 and 10:4, 18, the “Glory of Yahweh” refers specifically to the manlike form of God on the throne (1:26; cf. 8:2), but here it is apparently used by synecdoche for the whole ensemble: the divine figure, his throne, the dome, and the living creatures supporting the structure. “His place” could refer to the heavenly throne or to the “place” on earth where God was “incarnationally” present, normally between the cherubim of the tabernacle and (later) the Jerusalem temple, but now for a time even in the Babylonian exile, thousands of miles away from any sacred earthly structure (a thought picked up again in 11:16). These two places are linked by the vertical typology that pervades all biblical thinking—the correspondence between heaven and earth under God, as acclaimed in worship (“thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”; “therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name …”). This vertical typology is brought out in the doxology sung by the angels at the birth of Jesus Christ: (CC)

Glory to God in the highest,

      and on earth, peace to men of his good will. (Lk 2:14)

God’s glory was revealed on earth through the incarnate Word (Jn 1:14), and his incarnation is cause for celebration both on earth and in the highest heavens. The celestial and terrestrial choirs join in unison to laud the “King of glory” at his advent (Ps 24:7–10). (CC)

**3:14** LIFTED ME UP – The precise connection between the movement of the Glory and the transportation of Ezekiel by God’s Spirit is not specified, but it recalls the way other prophets, such as Elijah, were whisked away by the Spirit to do God’s bidding (cf. 1 Ki 18:12; 2 Ki 2:16), and even Philip in the NT had a similar experience (Acts 8:39–40). (CC)

*in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit.* The prophet, knowing the righteousness of God’s anger, personally identified with the divine emotions. (CSB)

For a prophet who rarely shares his emotions with us, the raw anger in “bitter, in the fury of my spirit” (3:14) is striking. “Bitter, embittered” (מַר) in a psychological sense is often combined idiomatically with נֶפֶשׁ in the sense of “mood.” Perhaps נֶפֶשׁ is absent here because the “spirit” (רוּחַ) often has that sense too and is to be thought of as doing double duty (his spirit was both bitter and furious). (CC)

Some of Ezekiel’s bitter anger may have been kindled already by his own forced exile, the devastation of Judah by the invading Babylonians, and his anguish at the impending doom of his recalcitrant people. The apostle Paul could express divine wrath (Rom 1:18) but also deep anguish for the unbelieving Jews of his day (Rom 9:1–5; 10:1). (CC)

*strong hand of the Lord upon me.* See note on 1:3. (CSB)

All in all, Ezekiel’s sense is not one of “liberation,” but of overmastering compulsion to carry out God’s call. Once he has received the divine Word, he is compelled to preach it, as was his older contemporary Jeremiah (Jer 20:9) and the apostles (Acts 4:20; 10:42), including Paul (1 Cor 9:16). (CC)

**3:15** *Tel Abib.* The only mention of the specific place where the exiles lived. In Babylonian the name meant “mound of the flood [i.e., destruction],” apparently referring to the ruined condition of the site. When used of the modern Israeli city, Tel Aviv, this name (Abib and Aviv are the same word in Hebrew) is understood to mean “hill of grain.” (CSB)

*seven days—overwhelmed.* Ezekiel was in the same state of spiritual shock that others in the Bible experienced after an encounter with God (see Ezr 9:4; Job 2:13; 40:4–5; Ac 9:9). Considering Ezekiel’s priestly background (see note on 1:3), the seven-day period may have been a parallel to the time required for a priest’s ordination (see Lev 8:1–33). (CSB)

Why *seven* days? There is no reason to dismiss the number as purely symbolic, but one should not miss the important biblical symbolism often attached to the number. One naturally thinks first of the seven days of creation, from Sabbath to Sabbath. Job’s “friends” sat with him for seven days and nights as if in mourning before they began to speak to him (Job 2:13). Much more pertinent is the role the number seven played in the consecration of priests (Ex 29:29–37; Lev 8:33–35; cf. 2 Chr 7:9). It is quite plausible that God meant for Ezekiel to understand these seven days as a sort of ordination to his prophetic priesthood. Comparable periods of less than seven days might be Ezra’s shocked silence at the extent of the returnees’ apostasy until the evening sacrifice (Ezra 9:4, which uses שָׁמַם, the same verb used here in Ezek 3:15) and Saul’s three-day fast after the Damascus-road Christophany (Acts 9:9). (CC)

OVERWHELMED – Psychologically, it is understandable that the excitement of the previous day would end in nervous exhaustion, but that is surely the least of it. It was a period of adjustment, to be sure, but far more than merely emotionally. He must live among his own people, but begin to “dance to the beat of a different drummer.” (CC)

*Warning to Israel*

**16 At the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me:  17 “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.  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. 20 “Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.  21 But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself.” 22 The hand of the LORD was upon me there, and he said to me, “Get up and go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you.”  23 So I got up and went out to the plain. And the glory of the LORD was standing there, like the glory I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. 24 Then the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet. He spoke to me and said: “Go, shut yourself inside your house.  25 And you, son of man, they will tie with ropes; you will be bound so that you cannot go out among the people.  26 I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be silent and unable to rebuke them, though they are a rebellious house.  27 But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you shall say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says.’ Whoever will listen let him listen, and whoever will refuse let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.**

**3:17** *I have made you a watchman.*† In ancient Israel, watchmen were stationed on the highest parts of the city wall to inform its inhabitants of the progress of a battle (1Sa 14:16) or of approaching messengers (2Sa 18:24–27; 2Ki 9:17–20). The prophets were spiritual watchmen, relaying God’s word to the people (see Jer 6:17; Hos 9:8; Hab 2:1). Ezekiel’s function as a watchman was to warn the exiles of the impending doom of Jerusalem and to teach that God holds each one responsible for his own behavior. This commission, repeated in 33:7–9, is spelled out in ch. 18. (CSB)

**3:18** The first example is where the watchman fails to warn the “wicked man” that God has declared “You shall surely die.” The man dies because of his iniquity, but the prophet is held responsible for his death because of his dereliction. The principle applies directly to modern ministry. The burden of the office of the ministry is not to be taken lightly, nor is the responsibility of each Christian to admonish his erring brother. In the world’s eyes—and sadly, in the estimation of much of visible Christendom—it is not a “capital crime” for a pastor to be remiss in warning about God’s verdict of death, that is, in preaching the Law, but the pastor is sure to be held accountable by a higher Judge. The pastor is no mere “spiritual advisor,” “counselor,” or “enabler,” but the public holder of the office of the keys—Christ’s keys, “the keys of death and Hades” (Rev 1:18; cf. Mt 16:19; Rev 3:7). (CC)

**3:19** This verse presents case 2, which is identical to case 1 (3:18), except that here the watchman has done his duty, and when the warning is rejected and the wicked man dies as a result of his iniquity, the watchman has saved his own life. Just how the fact that the prophet saves his life was conceptualized and what all that concept entails must parallel what has already been discussed in the previous verse. It underscores that faith is always personal (even though not isolated from the community, OT Israel and the NT church); no one can believe for someone else. It also emphasizes that faith manifests itself in love for one’s neighbor (Gal 5:6). (CC)

Love for the lost mandates warning that eternal death awaits the wicked man, even as eternal life is God’s gift to the righteous man, such as the prophet who “saves his life.” To take the easy route and to fail to warn the sinner—or worse yet, to preach a “gospel” that does not require repentance from sin and trust in Christ as the only Savior—is to hate one’s neighbor and to face God’s judgment for failure to be a watchman. (CC)

**3:20** Case 3 contemplates the sad case, all too familiar in Israel and the church, a “righteous man” (צַרִּיק), by all human measures a faithful member of the community, who apostatizes—who abandons or even renounces the faith and life he once professed. To compound the tragedy, the “watchman” also, for whatever reason, fails to give timely warnings and so is held accountable by God for the apostate’s death. This is a reminder that, to use Lutheran language, the *iustus* (“saint” or “justified person”) needs to hear God’s Law just as much as the *peccator* (“sinner”) precisely because we are always (throughout this life) simultaneously both (*simul iustus et peccator*). The pastor needs to contemplate case 3 even more than every Christian does. His holy office does not shield him from God’s wrath if he fails to exercise it. On the contrary, “to whomsoever is given much, much shall be required from him” (Lk 12:48). (CC)

STUMBLING BLOCK – It is *God* who places the “stumbling block” in front of him. Modern sentimental notions of God as “love” in some simplistic or even universalistic sense make this a very unpalatable statement. If it were misunderstood to say that God *caused* the righteous man to sin, we would have problems, perhaps double predestination. But if we diagram the sentence carefully, we note that this is still one of the protases (“when …”). The apodosis, the final death sentence (“he shall die”), is imminent, but here in the last protasis, we have, as it were, God’s “last ditch” attempt to arrest the man’s decline down the slippery slope before he finally crosses the point of no return. God seeks to rescue the man by issuing the call through the prophet (or the modern pastor) for the man to repent. However, the man may reject and so trip and fall over God’s warning, and if he does, then his fall is God’s judgment on his refusal to heed the prophetic Word that God intended to save him. (CC)

The formulation of this theological point antedates Ezekiel. A more familiar articulation of the thought occurs in Isaiah. Wicked King Ahaz (representing apostate Israel) refused to ask for a sign of God’s proffered salvation. Yet the people’s unbelief was no obstacle to God accomplishing redemption for all: God himself would provide the sign, namely, Immanuel, born of a virgin (Isaiah 7). But for those people who reject his Immanuel promise (Is 8:6–8), Yahweh himself will become a “stone of stumbling and a rock of offense” (Is 8:14). (CC)

The corresponding terms πρόσκομμα (“stumbling block”) and σκάνδαλον (“offense”) play a prominent role in the NT. St. Paul cites Is 8:14 and alludes to Ezek 3:20 in Rom 9:32–33 as he describes the failure of the Jews as a whole to believe in the promised Christ, although Gentiles did. And St. Peter applies this language to all who reject Christ (1 Pet 2:8). In Gal 5:11 St. Paul speaks of the “offense of the cross,” and just before his crucifixion our Lord warns his protesting disciples that all of them “will be offended” because of him that night (Mt 26:31). (CC)

RIGHTEOUS THINGS…NOT REMEBERED – Ezek 3:20 finally warns that the righteous man who apostatizes “shall die because of his sin, and his righteous deeds which he had done will not be remembered.” No one, no matter how righteous, can earn (or acquire from some other, “more righteous” saint) a “treasury of merit,” some accumulation of previous good deeds that might now outweigh his evil. God will not finally judge using some “scales of justice,” in which the good must be heavier than the bad—a common figure in ancient Egyptian depictions of a man’s final judgment, and still prominent in modern, populist religion or spirituality. This line of thought will be especially prominent in chapter 18: God judges according to people’s status *coram Deo* at the time of death, neither crediting them for past faith from which they have lapsed, nor holding repented and forgiven sin against them. Instead of balancing scales, it is all or nothing: with righteousness through faith (ultimately in Christ), all sin is forgotten (Jer 31:34), whereas without such justifying faith, any prior good is forgotten (Heb 6:4–8). (CC)

**3:21** Here, in case 4, in a way, is the positive motivation for the prophet to undertake his calling despite its bleak prospects. Not all of Israel is incorrigibly wicked and doomed to die. To return to the language of 3:20, there is an interval between a person’s first stirrings of apostatizing (perhaps even subconsciously) and his actual implementation of a return to his natural, fallen state. During this interval, it is always possible, by God’s grace, that the prophet’s warning may take effect. And, if the man (and the prophet) is “faithful unto death,” God’s promise is sure: “I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10). No person merits or chooses life of his own free will, but he is free to spurn or forfeit it. (CC)

**3:22** *hand of the Lord.* See note on 1:3. (CSB)

**3:23** GLORY OF THE LORD – Zimmerli makes an appropriate comparison of Ezekiel’s command to go out somewhere in the wide valley with the angel’s summons to St. Philip in Acts 8:26 to go somewhere “without first knowing what is to happen there.” Yahweh’s Glory, which appeared in Ezekiel 1, reappears here (and will later in chapters 10 and 43). Perhaps the reappearance here is intended to remind Ezekiel again that he is a mere creature, time- and space-bound, mortal. At any rate, Ezekiel responds with the same overwhelming awe as he had the first time (1:28b). His relationship with the holy God never becomes casual or chummy, and one may seriously ask whether Christians who espouse such a “relationship” are worshiping the God of Israel or a figment of their imagination. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: how one worships reflects (and also creates) how one believes. Worship and doctrine affect and reflect each other. (CC)

**3:24** The command to Ezekiel to seclude himself in his house is the first of the injunctions in 3:24–27, all of which on their face appear to inhibit the normal exercise of his calling. But a closer reading makes clear that they all prepare him for the successful performance of his task. He is to say and do nothing in public except when he is clearly “moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). The main point of the confinement in his house is Ezekiel’s seclusion from the public, a point to be reinforced by the following commands. It seems that all the locations of his preaching that are indicated in the book are at his house (8:1), since the elders or people come to him (14:1; 20:1; 33:30–31). (CC)

**3:26** *you will be silent.* Verses 26–27 indicate that the prophet would be unable to speak except when he had a direct word from the Lord. His enforced silence underscored Israel’s stubborn refusal to take God’s word seriously. This condition was relieved only after the fall of Jerusalem (24:27; 33:22). From that time on, Ezekiel was given messages of hope, which he continually shared with his fellow exiles. (CSB)

**3:27** Chapter 3 and the whole inaugural vision and prophetic call (chapters 1–3) end with a prophecy that Ezekiel’s preaching will continue in absolute faithfulness to Yahweh, whenever Yahweh wills: “Whenever I speak to you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord Yahweh.’ ” Ezekiel will not be able to serve as “a man who reproves” or “a prosecuting attorney” of the people in the ordinary sense (3:26), but perhaps with greater impact than if he had enjoyed the relative liberty of other prophets. Although the last words of the chapter reiterate that Israel is a “rebellious house,” the preceding words again leave open the possibility of repentance for individuals. No inexorable Greek μοῖρα, “fate,” or other determinism characterizes God’s judgment. The two alternatives (and there are only two!) are summarized in an almost formulaic restatement of the simple, but stark, alternatives: “Whoever listens, let him listen, and whoever refuses [to listen], let him refuse” (3:27). The negative alternative reminds one of the end of Isaiah’s call (Is 6:9), appropriated by our Lord himself to explain his ministry of preaching in parables (Mt 13:14–15 and parallels). And the positive, “Whoever listens, let him listen” (Ezek 3:27), is the prototype of one of Jesus’ favorite formulae: “The one who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (e.g., Lk 8:8). (CC)

And on a similar note the entire Scriptures end: “Outside are the dogs [homosexuals] and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters and everyone who loves and makes a lie. … The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let him who is thirsty come; let him who desires take the water of life without price. … He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:15, 17, 20). (CC)