

# EZEKIEL

## Chapter 33

*Ezekiel Is Israel's Watchman*

**The word of the LORD came to me: 2 “Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, 3 and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, 4 then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand. 7 “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 8 If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 9 But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.**

**Chs 33–48** Third major division of Ezekiel’s prophecies. Leaving the foreign, hostile nations buried and forgotten (chs 25–32), these final oracles proclaim that Israel, apparently also doomed to extinction, will figuratively rise from the grave of exile to serve God’s plan of salvation. In carrying it forward, God will, as it were, begin where He left off. The chosen people will experience a new exodus, return to the Promised Land, and again enjoy the special care of the Lord. However, its restoration is not an end in itself. It serves at the same time as a blueprint of what God ultimately will do through the descendants of Abraham to bless all nations in a restored fellowship with Him. (TLSB)

**33:1–37:28†** Sermons and oracles of comfort following the fall of Jerusalem. Interspersed are words of warning and judgment (e.g., 33:23–29; 34:1–19; 35; 36:1–7). (CSB)

**33:1-9** Before the news of Jerusalem’s capture by Nebuchadnezzar arrives in the land of the Chaldeans, Ezekiel is prepared for his new assignment: to be the preacher of restoration. The instructions he receives are, in effect, a recommissioning to the prophetic office. Such a basic orientation was necessary. Because the message of redemption was radically different from the threat of God’s wrath, delivered to the rebellious house in chs 1–24, Ezekiel might have concluded that the good news could be proclaimed on a different basis. (TLSB)

**33:2** *your people.* Fellow Israelites in exile with Ezekiel. *sword.* The invading army. (CSB)

Judeans exiled in Babylon. (TLSB)

*watchman.* A figure introduced in ch. 3 and expanded in ch. 18. (CSB)

Ezekiel’s work is still a matter of life and death. The task is still fraught with the greatest responsibilities for both the preacher and the hearers. (TLSB)

**33:3 trumpet.** An instrument made from a ram's horn (Jos 6:4, 6, 13), used to warn of approaching danger (Ne 4:18–20; Jer 4:19; Am 3:6) and to announce the beginnings of religious periods (e.g., Day of Atonement, Lev 25:9; New Moon festival, Ps 81:3). (CSB)

**33:5** *he would have saved his life.* Ezekiel warns that unless each individual receives the proffered escape from impending death, that person will not save his life. (TLSB)

**33:6** *taken away in his iniquity.* Condemned and punished with exile. (TLSB)

*his blood.* His life, blood being the life principle (see Ge 9:5; 42:22). (CSB)

**33:7** *house of Israel.* Both the nation and the individuals. Compare vv. 7–9 with 3:17–19. (CSB)

**33:1–9** God changes Ezekiel's focus. No longer does Ezekiel speak against the nations. Instead, God calls Ezekiel to serve once again as Israel's watchman "to warn the wicked to turn from his way" (v 8). Today, God calls us not only to repent of our sins and receive the forgiveness He offers through Christ but also to warn others and to announce the Lord's forgiveness for all who repent. Thankfully, the Lord is watching over us and will sustain us in this vital service. • Lord, You continually provide leadership and guidance through servants of Your Word. Grant us swiftness to answer Your call of repentance and service. Amen. (TLSB)

*Why Will You Die, Israel?*

**10** "And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: 'Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?' **11** Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? **12** "And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness[a] when he sins. **13** Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. **14** Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, **15** if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. **16** None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live. **17** "Yet your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not just,' when it is their own way that is not just. **18** When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. **19** And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by this. **20** Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways."

**33:10** *Our transgressions and sins.* The first time the exiles expressed consciousness of sin. Previously they had blamed their fathers (18:2) and even God (18:19, 25). (CSB)

Cf ch 18 for the principle of individual responsibility. As preacher of restoration, Ezekiel has to cope with negative responses such as despair. When his fellow prisoners came face-to-face with the consequences of sin (as predicted by Ezekiel), they stoically resigned themselves to rot away. (TLSB)

**33:11** *I have no pleasure.*† The question of 18:23 is now a statement. God’s intention for his creation is life, not death. (CSB)

“God does not will sin and has no pleasure in sin ... nor has He pleasure in [the sinner’s] condemnation” (FC SD XI 81). Ter: “To all sins, then, committed whether by flesh or spirit, whether by deed or will, the same *God* who has destined penalty by means of judgment, has withal engaged to grant pardon by means of repentance” (ANF 3:659). Chem: “God clearly says in the case of the sins of the ungodly, which He foresees, that He neither wills, approves, aids, nor effects them, nor does He force their wills” (LTh 1:207). (TLSB)

*Turn!* The third call for repentance (see 14:6; 18:30). (CSB)

**33:12–20**† Deals with the same subject as 18:21–29—namely, that God judges the individual, whether righteous or wicked. (CSB)

**33:15** *statutes of life.* The purpose of God’s law was to foster and protect life (cf. 20:13, 21). (CSB)

*he will surely live.* The entire section is Ezekiel’s answer to the despairing question of v. 10. (CSB)

**33:10–20** As a watchman for the Lord, Ezekiel carries God’s Word to His people. God’s Word remains effective: God’s Law causes despair in sinful hearts, leading them to repent. Then, God’s Word reaches out with the life-giving power of the Gospel to absolve the sinner and create a new life in Christ. His Word bears the same life-giving power that raised Jesus from the dead. • Lord, we thank You for Your mercy. Grant us sincere repentance and new life in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

#### *Jerusalem Struck Down*

**21** In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, a fugitive from Jerusalem came to me and said, “The city has been struck down.” **22** Now the hand of the LORD had been upon me the evening before the fugitive came; and he had opened my mouth by the time the man came to me in the morning, so my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute. **23** The word of the LORD came to me: **24** “Son of man, the inhabitants of these waste places in the land of Israel keep saying, ‘Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess.’ **25** Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: You eat flesh with the blood and lift up your eyes to your idols and shed blood; shall you then possess the land? **26** You rely on the sword, you commit abominations, and each of you defiles his neighbor’s wife; shall you then possess the land? **27** Say this to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword, and whoever is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in strongholds and in caves shall die by pestilence. **28** And I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and her proud might shall come to an end, and the mountains of Israel shall be so desolate that none will pass through. **29** Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations that they have committed. **30** “As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, ‘Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.’ **31** And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in

**their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. 32 And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it. 33 When this comes—and come it will!—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.”**

**33:21–22** News that the city has been struck down marked a new epoch in Ezekiel’s ministry. Not only did he become the prophet of restoration, but in preaching redemption, he also was no longer to be restricted in communication as before. (TLSB)

**33:21** *twelfth year ... tenth month ... fifth day.* Jan. 8, 585 B.C., five months after the Jerusalem temple was burned. See date in 2Ki 25:8, which in modern reckoning is Aug. 14, 586. The journey between Jerusalem and Babylon could be made in four months (Ezr 7:9). (CSB)

It took the fugitive one and a half years to elude the Babylonian occupation forces and to make his way to the exiles. Some Hbr manuscripts and the ancient versions read “the eleventh year,” thus reducing the interval to six months. (TLSB)

*a fugitive.*† The first of the exiles of 586. (CSB)

*The city has been struck down.* With this statement all of Ezekiel’s previous prophecies were fulfilled and vindicated. He was then sent with a new mission: pastoral comfort. (CSB)

**33:22** *no longer mute.* The muteness that had come upon him at the beginning of his ministry was lifted. (CSB)

As a sign for the people, Ezekiel had not spoken since his wife died. (TLSB)

**33:24** *waste places.* The residents of Jerusalem not exiled in 586 B.C. (CSB)

They escaped massacre and captivity when Jerusalem fell. (TLSB)

*Abraham was only one man ... But we are many.* A boast by the unrepentant, similar to that of 11:15 (cf. Lk 3:8). (CSB)

Ezekiel had to confront two groups (vv 23, 30) with the demand that they change their attitude and conduct. The impenitent survivors of the fall of Jerusalem made the arrogant claim that they would have possession of the land simply because Abraham, who received it by promise, was only one individual whereas they are many. But they will find out that willful perpetrators of crime will not inherit the Kingdom. By their impenitence (vv 23–29; cf 18:6–13; 22:6–12), they excluded themselves from its blessings even though Ezekiel, the prophet of restoration, offered these blessings to all people. (TLSB)

**33:25–26** Sins against the Law of Moses, which the arrogant survivors continued to violate. (TLSB)

**33:27** *sword ... wild animals ... plague.* Cf. the threefold threat in 5:12; 7:15; 12:16 and the fourfold threat in 14:12–21. (CSB)

*strongholds and in caves.* Natural places of refuge in the Shephelah or the Judean wilderness, such as the many caves near the Salt Sea. (TLSB)

**33:30–33** Words of assurance meant for Ezekiel alone. (CSB)

**33:30** *your people*. The second group, Ezekiel’s fellow prisoners, was to be told that God’s Word of promise is not a cheap commodity. (TLSB)

*Come, and hear*. They thought his preaching to be like the singing of love songs (v 32), to which they could listen for their amusement yet without committing themselves to do what his message required of them. (TLSB)

**33:31** *sit before you*. As the elders had (8:1; 14:1). (CSB)

*greedy*. The people were waiting for Ezekiel to tell them how they could personally profit from the situation rather than what God’s larger designs were for them (cf. Mt 20:20–28). (CSB)

They do not heed the Word, being preoccupied with material gain. How firmly this indicts complacent hearts today, who know the message of the Lord and His Church and can comment on whether or not a sermon or teaching is “good,” but remain unmoved to believe the Word or fulfill it. In the end, they turn back to a discussion of their own prosperity and satisfaction. (TLSB)

**33:32** *one who sings*. May indicate that Ezekiel chanted his oracles (see 2Ki 3:15; Isa 5:1), but more likely the prophet was using a metaphor. (CSB)

**33:21–33** A turning point has occurred in Ezekiel’s ministry. When word of the destruction of Jerusalem reaches Ezekiel, he knows God has freed him from his previous assignment (24:27). Today, God continues to call individuals into His service, whether as full-time church workers or as volunteers. He likewise calls us to let go of earlier assignments and move into new areas of service. God knows our needs as His people, and He will provide for us and sustain us in fruitful service. • Gracious God, You provide pastors, teachers, and leaders to guide us in Your ways, calling them by grace. Give me a ready heart and steady hands. Amen. (TLSB)