EZEKIEL 33

The Watchman on the Wall: Turn and Live

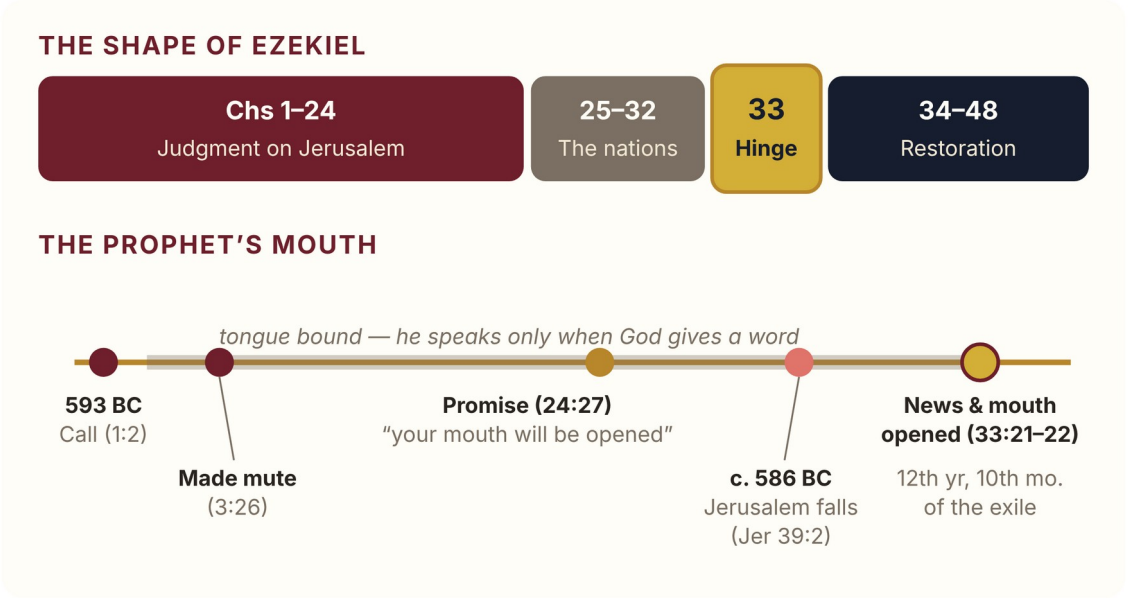
“Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’”

EZEKIEL 33:11

Where Ezekiel has brought us

1. Ezekiel 33 is the hinge of the whole book.

2. Before the news comes, God renews Ezekiel's call as watchman, repeating 3:17–21 almost word for word.



The Watchman on the Wall

Sound the alarm; every hearer answers for his own response

EZEKIEL 33:2

"Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, 'If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman,

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik notes that the watchman principle 'was a great assurance to Ezekiel and Jeremiah because they warned many but few listened.' The prophet answered for faithfulness, not results.

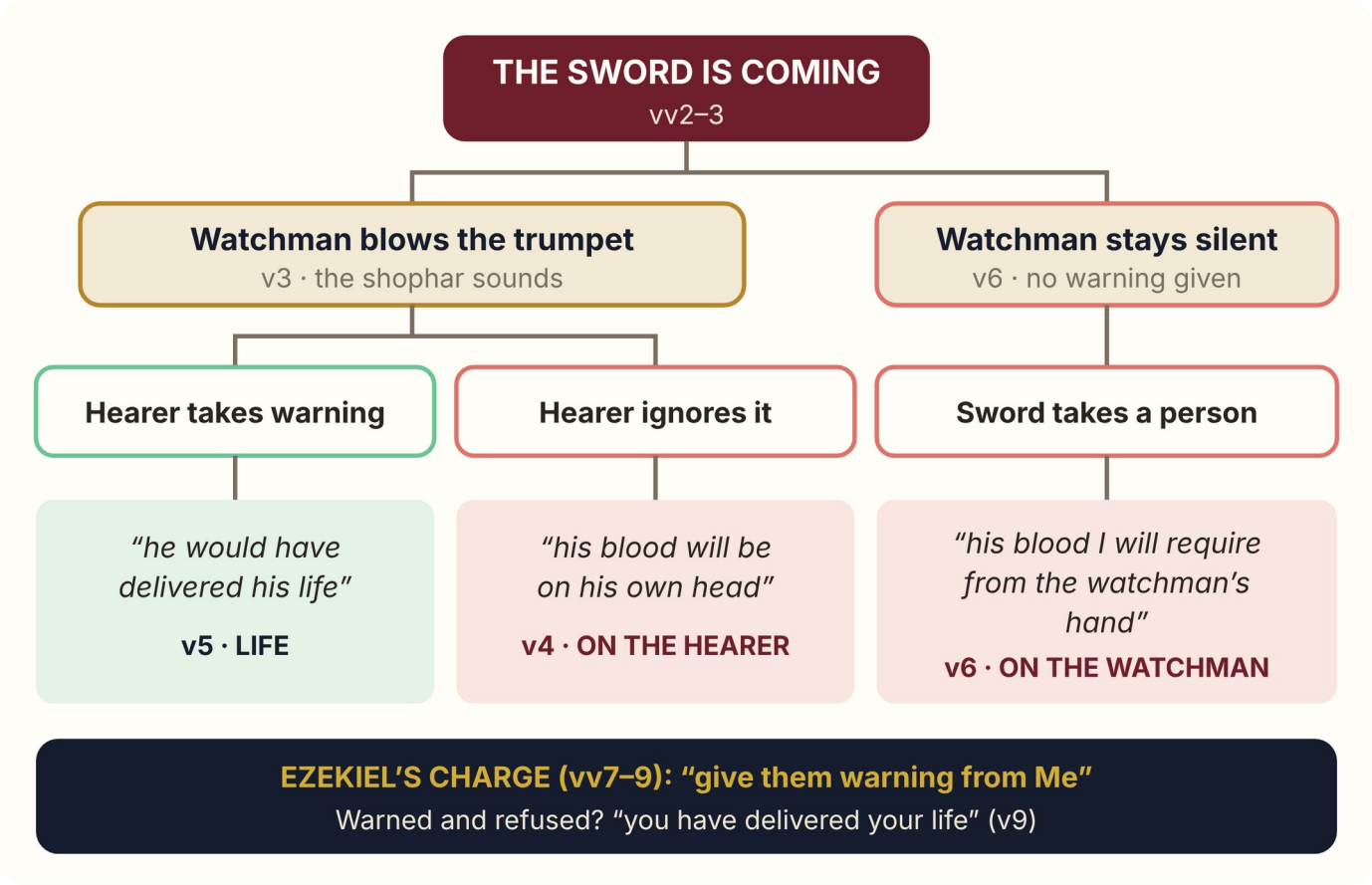
WHAT IT MEANS

In the ancient world a city's safety depended on the man posted on the wall. If he blew the trumpet and a man ignored it, "his blood will be on his own head" (v4).

watchman (צָפָה)
TSOPHE · "WATCHMAN"

The tsophe is a lookout or sentinel, the man posted on the city wall to watch closely for danger.

The Watchman's Duty (33:1–9)



Who carries the blood: the watchman answers for the warning, and every hearer answers for his own response.

Turn Back and Live

God swears by His life that He wants sinners to live

EZEKIEL 33:10

"Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus you have spoken, saying, "Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?"'

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik hears an accusation of unfairness in the exiles' question, "how then can we survive?" (v10). God answers with an oath and a plea.

WHAT IT MEANS

The exiles were fatalists: "we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?"

turn (שׁוּב)

SHUB · "TURN BACK"

Shub means to turn back, return, repent. It is the hinge word of this section: the wicked man who turns from his way lives; the righteous man who turns from his righteousness to iniquity dies (vv18–19).

“The City Has Been Taken”

The news arrives, and the prophet’s mouth is opened

EZEKIEL 33:21

Now in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month, the refugees from Jerusalem came to me, saying, “The city has been taken.”

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik notes that this report came about seven years after Ezekiel’s first prophecies (1:2–3).

WHAT IT MEANS

Two short verses carry the turning point of the book. “The city has been taken” (v21) — everything Ezekiel warned about in chapters 1–24 has happened.

speechless (אָלַם)
ALAM · “BOUND, MUTE”

Alam means to be bound or mute. Since 3:26 Ezekiel’s tongue had been bound except when God gave him a word; in 24:27 God promised, “On that day your mouth will be opened to him who escaped.”

Should You Then Possess the Land?

Claiming Abraham's promise while living in sin

EZEKIEL 33:24

"Son of man, they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one, yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession.'

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik points to Jeremiah 40–44 for who these survivors were — the people left in the land after Jerusalem fell.

WHAT IT MEANS

Back in Judah, the people living "in these waste places" (v24) were quoting Abraham. But they lived nothing like Abraham: "You eat meat with the blood in it, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood" (v25).

possession (מוֹרָשָׁה)
MORASHAH · "POSSESSION"

Morashah is an inheritance or possession. The survivors in the ruins of Judah claimed it: "to us who are many the land has been given as a possession" (v24).

Hearers, Not Doers

A popular preacher and an unchanged audience

EZEKIEL 33:30

"But as for you, son of man, your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, 'Come now and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD.'

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik observes that Ezekiel had become popular. People talked about him by the walls and in the doorways and invited one another to come hear what the LORD was saying.

WHAT IT MEANS

This is the most uncomfortable part of the chapter for anyone who loves Bible study. The exiles came, sat, listened and enjoyed it — they "hear your words, but they do not do them" (v31).

lustful desires (עֲגָבִים)
AGABIM · "PASSIONATE DESIRE"

Agabim means passionate desire or lust. The exiles sat before Ezekiel "as My people" (v31), but "they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain" — betsa (H1215), profit, unjust gain.

What to carry from this chapter

1

Faithfulness, not results.

The watchman answers for sounding the trumpet; each hearer answers for his own response (vv4–9).

2

A great assurance.

Guzik says this principle comforted Ezekiel and Jeremiah, who warned many while few listened.

3

The tsophe watches closely.

The watchman is a lookout posted to see danger first and warn the people below.

4

God swears by His life.

“As I live!” — the Lord puts His own life behind His desire that the wicked turn and live (v11).

More to carry

5

Shub means turn around.

Repentance in this chapter is a change of direction proven by restoring the pledge and repaying the stolen (v15).

6

Not irreversible.

Guzik stresses that God's pronouncements of life or death are not fixed; a man who turns is met by mercy.

7

Promises are no shield.

The survivors quoted Abraham while eating blood and worshiping idols, and God asked, "Should you then possess the land?"

8

More than a beautiful voice.

Guzik notes the exiles treated Ezekiel as entertainment, but when his words came true they would know a prophet had been among them.

Talk it through

1. Who has God placed on your wall — and what sword do you see coming for him?

2. Why would God swear an oath by His own life about the death of the wicked?

3. What does real turning look like in the details of a man's life?

4. How were the survivors misusing the promise to Abraham — and where do we do the same?

5. Where are you enjoying the song of God's Word without doing it?

CLOSING

The trumpet has sounded, and the God who sounds it does not want you to die. He swears by His own life: turn back, and live. In Christ, every sin of the man who turns is remembered against him no more — so don't just enjoy the song; do what He says.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

O·I·A study, slides and reflection journal: see the Ezekiel study page.