

The LORD Is There

Exile, Glory, and the God Who Comes Back: A Study of Ezekiel

Session 3. The Watchman and the Brick

Reading: Ezekiel 3:16-5:17

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that Ezekiel is made responsible for warning, not for results, and that God makes the prophet's own body the sermon.

Catholic Touchstone

The duty of fraternal correction and witness: speaking truth in love is a work of mercy whose outcome belongs to God, and the sacramental instinct that God communicates spiritual realities through bodily signs.

Last week the group watched the glory of God roll into Babylon on a throne of wheels. Tonight the vision gets a job description. Ezekiel is appointed watchman, given the strangest set of duties in the prophetic corpus, and then, astonishingly, silenced. For roughly a year his sermon is not his voice but his body: a clay brick under siege, a man tied down on his side, rationed bread, a shaved head. Two things should land by the end of the night. First, God draws a bright, merciful line between the watchman's duty (sound the warning) and the hearer's response (not his to control). Second, God is already doing something he will keep doing all the way to Bethlehem: preaching through flesh.

What You Need to Know

Where we are in the story

Session 2 ended with Ezekiel sitting overwhelmed among the exiles at Tel-abib for seven days (3:15). Tonight opens at the end of that week: the word of the LORD comes and gives the stunned man his commission. Everything in this passage happens in Babylon among the first wave of exiles, years before Jerusalem actually falls. The people around Ezekiel still believe the city is safe, the temple untouchable, and the exile short. His entire assignment tonight is to contradict that comfortable story.

What a watchman was

Ancient walled cities posted a sentry on the wall or a tower. His whole job was to see danger while it was still far off and blow the trumpet. He could not make anyone take shelter; he could only make sure no one died unwarned. If he blew the trumpet and people ignored it, their deaths were on them. If he saw the sword coming and stayed silent, their blood was on him. Ezekiel is not the first prophet given this image (the group does not need this list, but you do): Jeremiah 6:17 and Habakkuk 2:1 use the same figure. What is distinctive in Ezekiel 3:16-21 is how precisely God spells out the four cases and where responsibility falls in each.

Sign-acts: a real prophetic genre, not a breakdown

Ezekiel's street theater sits inside an established prophetic tradition of commanded symbolic action. Isaiah walked stripped and barefoot as a sign against Egypt (Isaiah 20). Jeremiah buried a loincloth, smashed a flask, and wore a yoke (Jeremiah 13, 19, 27). Hosea's marriage was itself the message. Some modern readers reach for psychiatric explanations for Ezekiel; be ready for that (see the objection

bench), but notice what the text itself shows: dated, structured, commanded actions with stated meanings, and a prophet lucid enough to argue back about the cooking fuel and be heard (4:14-15). This is deliberate embodied preaching, not compulsion.

The muteness, honestly

In 3:26-27 God ties Ezekiel's tongue so that he is mute except when God opens his mouth. Since Ezekiel plainly delivers oracles in the following chapters, scholars debate what exactly this means: some read a total muteness lifted for each oracle, others a restriction, meaning he may speak only what God gives him to say. The practical details often attached to that reading, no small talk, no commentary, no reproof on his own initiative, are the interpreters' inference and not the text's statement. The Church has not settled this and you should not either; present it as an open question. What matters for tonight is the theological point both readings share: the watchman's voice belongs entirely to God. Keep 3:27 in view; the book will return to this closed mouth, and it matters that the group notices the setup without being told the payoff.

The numbers in 4:4-6

The Hebrew text gives 390 days for the iniquity of Israel and 40 for Judah, a day for each year. The ancient Greek translation gives different figures, and commentators ancient and modern disagree about which historical periods are meant. Do not manufacture certainty here. The point the text itself insists on is clear regardless: the years of accumulated iniquity are measured, real, and laid out in public, one day at a time, on one man's body.

The brick

In Babylon, soft clay was the writing surface of the whole civilization: contracts, letters, school exercises, and even city plans were incised on clay (a famous surviving tablet carries a plan of the city of Nippur). So when God tells Ezekiel to take a brick and portray Jerusalem on it, he is using the empire's own notepad to publish Jerusalem's fate. The iron plate set between prophet and city (4:3) is the most chilling piece. The text calls it a sign and does not decode it; many interpreters read the plate as something hard and impassable standing between God's face and that city, and that reading is worth offering as a reading. Ezekiel, playing God's part in the siege, presses the attack. This is a sign, the text says, for the house of Israel.

Why chapter 5 turns up the heat

The shaved hair divided into thirds (5:1-4) decodes the whole sequence: plague and famine inside the walls, sword outside, scattering to the winds. But verse 3 hides a small mercy the group should find for themselves: a few hairs bound into the hem of the prophet's garment. Then 5:5-17 gives the indictment. Jerusalem was set at the center of the nations and rebelled more wickedly than the nations around her; election did not lower the stakes, it raised them. Handle this section briskly but do not skip it, because it answers the question every honest reader is asking by now: why is God doing all this?

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The watchman's lineage runs forward, not just back

The watchman figure comes to Ezekiel from the prophetic tradition (Jeremiah 6:17; Habakkuk 2:1; Isaiah 62:6), but its most striking fulfillment is in the New Testament, and the group will find it themselves tonight: St. Paul's farewell at Miletus in Acts 20:26-28 speaks of being innocent of the blood of all, precisely because he did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God. That is Ezekiel's grammar of blood and warning on an apostle's lips, and in the next breath Paul hands the charge to the

overseers of the Church. Paul's charge to the overseers is his own, not a commentary on Ezekiel; but the Church has long heard the watchman's office continuing in the pastoral office, and in a real measure in every baptized witness. Offer that as the tradition's reading rather than as the passage's conclusion.

The body as sermon points toward the Word made flesh

Tonight God preaches through a human body: a bound posture, a rationed diet, a shaved head, a shut mouth. This is the sacramental instinct of the whole economy of salvation, that spiritual realities reach us through flesh and sign (the Catechism grounds this at 1146). The trajectory runs from the sign-acts of the prophets to the Incarnation itself, where the message and the messenger are finally one. Do not preach that whole arc tonight; let the group feel the pattern and name it.

Bearing iniquity: the sign and the substance

In 4:4-6 Ezekiel is told to bear the punishment of the house of Israel on his own side. Be precise here, because the group may leap ahead of the text: Ezekiel's bearing is symbolic. He dramatizes the weight of the people's sin; he does not and cannot atone for it. But the gesture points forward to the Servant of Isaiah 53 who bears iniquity really, and to Christ, who bore our sins in his body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). The honest formulation: Ezekiel carries the sign, Christ carries the substance.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Gregory the Great, d. 604

Preaching on this very passage, St. Gregory teaches that the preacher is called a watchman because a watchman stands on the heights to see danger while it is still far off; whoever would warn others must live on a height of vision and of life. Then, remarkably, this pope turns the text against himself: he confesses that his own tongue does not always preach as it ought and that his life does not always follow even what his tongue manages to say, yet he does not dare fall silent, because the charge to warn still stands.

Homilies on Ezekiel, Book 1, Homily 11. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone in the room who feels too compromised to speak up for the faith: the greatest preacher-pope of the early Middle Ages felt exactly that, and concluded that his weakness excused him from pride, not from the trumpet.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, d. c. 107

I am God's wheat, and I am to be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may become the pure bread of Christ.

Letter to the Romans 4.

For the group. Ignatius, traveling under guard to his execution, understood that his body itself had become his last and loudest sermon. He is the clearest early Christian heir of what God does with Ezekiel tonight: the witness's flesh preaches what words alone cannot.

St. John Henry Newman, d. 1890

God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission.

Meditations and Devotions.

For the group. This is the watchman's charge translated for the person in the chair next to you: a definite, personal commission whose faithful execution, not whose visible success, is what God asks. Newman goes on in the same meditation to draw the conclusion Ezekiel needed: therefore I will trust him, whatever I am, wherever I am.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 1146. As a being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols. This is the principle behind God preaching through Ezekiel's body, and behind the sacramental life.

CCC 1829. Among the fruits and demands of charity the Catechism names fraternal correction: love that never warns is not the charity the Church describes.

CCC 1868. We can bear responsibility for the sins of others when we cooperate in them, including by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so. This is the watchman's blood-on-your-hands principle in the Church's own moral grammar.

CCC 2447. The spiritual works of mercy include instructing, advising and admonishing. Charitable warning is an application of those works, which places it among the works of mercy rather than the works of judgment.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Follow the glory (develop). In 3:23 the glory appears again, out on the plain, the same glory Ezekiel saw by the Chebar. Touch it lightly: the glory is on the move and keeps meeting Ezekiel outside the temple. Do not preview where it goes next; that is Session 4's discovery.

Son of man (develop). The address hammers through tonight's passage (3:17, 3:25, 4:1, 4:16, 5:1). Let someone notice the repetition and simply ask the group to keep counting. Do not resolve it.

The opened mouth (plant). 3:26-27: Ezekiel is made mute except when God opens his mouth. Plant this quietly tonight, ideally in the group's own words. It resolves at Session 9, so resist any urge to explain it now.

The hairs in the hem (plant). 5:3-4: a few hairs bound in the skirt of the garment, and then some even of those thrown into the fire. A remnant kept close, and smaller than it first appears. This seed pays off when God promises to be a sanctuary to a remnant and, later, to give them a new heart. Plant only; no forward references aloud.

Sealed guess (develop). The guesses are sealed and stay sealed until Session 12. If anyone asks, smile and say the envelope is doing its work.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Ezekiel reads like a case study: visions, muteness, lying immobilized for months, compulsive symbolic behavior. Isn't the honest explanation psychiatric rather than prophetic?

Take it seriously, because a thoughtful skeptic will. Three observations from the text itself. First, sign-acts are an established prophetic genre across centuries (Isaiah 20, Jeremiah 13 and 19, Hosea 1-3); Ezekiel is working inside a known public form, not inventing private rituals. Second, the actions are dated, commanded in advance, and given stated public meanings; what the text shows us is deliberate public sign-acting, not private compulsion. Do not go further than that. A retrospective diagnosis at twenty-six centuries is not something anyone can responsibly settle, and the presence of mental illness would not by itself tell against the prophecy. Third, in 4:14-15 Ezekiel objects to one command on grounds of conscience and God adjusts it; that is a lucid moral agent in dialogue, not compulsion. None of this coerces faith, but it removes the shortcut. The real question the book poses is not Ezekiel's sanity; it is whether God actually spoke.

Blood required at your hand: isn't that spiritually abusive, making me guilty for other people's choices?

Read the four cases in 3:18-21 closely and you find the opposite. The watchman is never once held responsible for anyone's response. He is responsible for exactly one thing, the warning, and the moment it is given, the hearer's choice is the hearer's alone. This is a liberation for anyone crushed by the outcome of someone else's decisions. The Catechism's parallel (1868) is similarly bounded: responsibility attaches to real cooperation or culpable silence where there is a duty, not to failing to control another soul.

Why 390 days and 40 days? Older translations and commentaries give different numbers.

Honestly: the Hebrew text reads 390 and 40, the ancient Greek differs, and scholars debate which spans of history are meant. The Church has not defined it and you should not pretend otherwise. Every reading agrees on the point: the iniquity is measured, year by year, and displayed on the prophet's body.

Session Goals

1. The group states in their own words the watchman's exact duty and its exact limit: warn faithfully, and leave the response to the hearer and to God.
2. The group discovers, in the text they find themselves, that the watchman's charge continues into the New Testament and the Church.
3. The group traces each of the sign-acts (brick, posture, rations, hair) and articulates that God is preaching through the prophet's body.
4. The group feels the weight of the strongest opposing reading of 3:20 and answers it from the text.
5. The group leaves with one concrete, charitable act of truth-telling for the week.

Time Note

Planned for 75 to 90 minutes

Roughly: Win 10 minutes, reading 12 (this is a long passage, use the reader plan and summaries), watchman block (Q1-Q4) 25, sign-acts block (Q5-Q8) 22, hair and Jerusalem (Q9-Q10) 10, synthesis (Q11) 5, Send, Live It, and closing prayer 8. That is a full 90; use the cuts below in order if you are running a 75-minute room.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Drop the Dig Deeper on Q8 (the Acts echo of Ezekiel's protest); it is a delight, not a load-bearing wall.
2. Compress Q2's four cases to the first and the last (unwarned wicked; warned righteous), stating the middle two in the answer summary.
3. Fold Q9 and Q10 together: trace the thirds and the hem quickly, then summarize 5:5-17 in one sentence and move to Q11.
4. If truly desperate, drop Q7's discussion and deliver its answer in 60 seconds; do not drop the honest distinction between sign and substance.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, your word does not return to you empty. Tonight you show us a man you made responsible for speaking and not for results. Give us ears to hear hard things, courage to say true things, and the humility to leave outcomes in your hands. We ask this through Christ our Lord, the Word made flesh. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. Tell us about a warning someone once gave you that you did not want to hear. Did you listen, and what happened?

W2. Have you ever had to deliver news you knew someone did not want? What was the hardest part, saying it, or living with how they took it?

Both questions are loading tonight's central distinction, duty versus outcome, without naming it. Let the stories breathe.

Read

Read aloud

This is a long passage, so use four readers and keep it moving: Reader 1 takes 3:16-27 (the watchman and the silencing), Reader 2 takes 4:1-8 (the brick and the bed), Reader 3 takes 4:9-17 (the rations), Reader 4 takes 5:1-12 (the hair and the sentence). Then you as leader summarize 5:13-17 in a sentence or two rather than reading it. Ask the group to note anything that strikes them as strange; strangeness is tonight's doorway.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

The Watchman (3:16-27)

1. Look again at 3:17-19. What is the one thing God actually commands the watchman to do? And what outcomes does God explicitly leave outside the watchman's job description?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. What is Ezekiel told to do?

Depth. Why might it be mercy, and not just bookkeeping, for God to separate the duty to warn from the power to convert?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The command is single and clear: hear the word from God's mouth and give warning from him. That is the entire

duty. What is not in the job description: whether the wicked man listens, whether he turns, whether he lives. In verse 19, if the watchman warns and the man does not turn, the man dies in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life. The watchman is measured entirely on faithfulness, never on results. Notice too that the word comes from God's mouth, not the watchman's opinions; he passes on a warning, he does not invent one.

2. Verses 18-21 lay out four scenarios like a lawyer. Chart them together: in each case, who is warned or not warned, who lives or dies, and at whose hand is the blood required?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Case one: wicked man, not warned, he dies in his sin, and his blood is required at the watchman's hand. Case two: wicked man, warned, does not turn, he dies, and the watchman has saved his own life. Case three: a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, no warning given, he dies, and again his blood is on the watchman. Do not skip the hardest clause in verse 20, 'and I lay a stumbling block before him.' The Church has never defined it; the reading most consistent with the rest of Scripture is the same judicial permission we will meet at 14:9, God permitting a man already turning to meet the consequences of his own turning, never God authoring the sin. If someone raises it, say that plainly and say that it is a permitted reading and not a settled one. Case four: the righteous man is warned, takes the warning, and lives, and the watchman lives too. The pattern under all four: the message is the watchman's responsibility; the response never is. And the blood language is not decoration; God is saying that culpable silence is a form of participation in someone's ruin.

Dig Deeper

The Catechism carries this exact logic: CCC 1868 says we share responsibility for others' sins when we fail to disclose or hinder them despite a real obligation, and CCC 1829 names fraternal correction as a demand of charity itself.

3. Verse 20 says a righteous man can turn from his righteousness, die in his sin, and his righteous deeds shall not be remembered. Before we react, let's hear the strongest version of a reading many serious Christians hold.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Many Reformed Christians would say: this cannot mean a truly righteous person can be finally lost. Jesus says of his sheep that no one shall snatch them out of his hand (John 10:28), and John writes of apostates that they went out from us because they were not of us (1 John 2:19). And they would not rest the case on that alone. Ezekiel's righteous man, they would say, is righteous in the covenantal and external sense the Old Testament often uses, a member of the visible covenant people whose standing is not the same thing as saving regeneration; the death threatened through this whole section is covenantal and temporal, the death of the exile and the sword, not a verdict on his eternal destiny; and the warning itself is one of the ordinary means by which God preserves those who are truly his, so that the elect persevere precisely by heeding warnings like this one. On that reading the passage is fully serious and still teaches nothing about losing saving grace. And it protects something precious: assurance, the confidence that salvation rests on God's grip, not on my fragile grip on God.

Answering from the text. Feel the strength of that, especially its pastoral instinct; assurance matters, and salvation really does rest on God's initiative. But now read verse 20 with the text's own seriousness. God calls the man righteous, speaks of his righteous deeds which he has done, and describes a real turn, a real fall, a real death. Take the three distinctions in order. Covenantal righteousness is a real category, and it is why this argument cannot

be settled from one verse; what the verse gives us is a man God himself calls righteous, with righteous deeds he has done, who really turns and really dies. Temporal death is likewise real in Ezekiel, and chapter 18 will push the same language past the merely temporal when it sets life and death before each soul. And on warnings as a means of perseverance, note what that reading costs: God stakes blood-guilt on warnings whose outcome is already fixed, which strains the plain force of the passage even if it does not break it. The whole watchman structure assumes that warnings can change real outcomes for real people in both directions. The Catholic reading holds both truths the objection tries to protect and the text insists on: grace is entirely God's gift and it can be truly received and then truly abandoned. The Council of Trent teaches that grace really given is really lost through grave sin (Decree on Justification, Session 7). Ezekiel does not define the state of the righteous man, and the passage should not be made to; what can be said is that this Catholic reading takes the text's own seriousness at face value, and exactly why the Church keeps a confessional and not just a certificate.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The text presents the man's righteousness as genuine and his fall as real, which is why the warning matters and why blood attaches to silence. The Catholic position: grace is pure gift, truly received, and truly losable through grave sin, and therefore the life of grace is a lived fidelity, sustained by the sacraments, not a one-time transaction. Assurance, rightly understood, rests on God's proven fidelity, not on a guarantee that my freedom has been switched off.

4. Now the strangest turn of the night so far: 3:22-27. God has just appointed a watchman, and immediately ties him up in his house and makes him mute. Why would God silence the very man he just told to speak?

Take it as far as the room wants

Ground. What might it feel like to be given a message and forbidden to add your own spin to it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Look at the release valve in verse 27: but when I speak with you, I will open your mouth. Ezekiel is not silenced instead of being a watchman; he is silenced into being a pure one. He may speak only what God gives, when God gives it, with nothing of his own added, no commentary, no small talk, no freelance rebukes. Scholars debate whether the muteness was total between oracles or a restriction to God's words only; both readings agree on the point, that this mouth now belongs to God. And the silence itself preaches: a people who would not listen now get a prophet who cannot chat. Also notice verse 23: the glory of the LORD stood there, like the glory he saw by the Chebar. Keep an eye on that glory; and keep an eye on that phrase about the opened mouth. The book is not done with either.

The Brick and the Bed (4:1-17)

5. Chapter 4 opens with what looks like a child's game: a brick, a model siege, an iron plate. In Babylon, clay was the empire's paper; everything from contracts to city maps was pressed into it. So what is God publishing on this brick, and what might the iron plate between Ezekiel and the little city mean?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God is publishing Jerusalem's fate on Babylon's own writing material, in public, before it happens, so that no one can later call it bad luck. The siege works, the mound, the camps, the battering rams, say: this is coming and it is deliberate. The iron plate is the most fearful piece. It stands between the prophet, who is acting God's part, and the city: something hard and impassable now separates God's face from Jerusalem, and it was built by her sin, not his indifference. Verse 3 gives the genre label for everything tonight: this is a sign for the house of Israel. God has moved from sending words to staging them.

Live discovery

Split into pairs. Turn to Acts 20:26-28, St. Paul's farewell to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus. Find two things: the phrase that comes straight out of tonight's passage, and what Paul says he did that lets him use it. Then look at verse 28 and answer: who does the charge pass to next?

Let them find it. Acts 20:26-28

6. The watchman's charge sounds like it belongs to one strange prophet in one strange century. Let's test that. Centuries later, a missionary says goodbye to a church he loves, knowing he will never see them again, and he reaches for exactly this language.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Paul declares that he is innocent of the blood of all of them, and gives the reason: he did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God. That is Ezekiel's grammar exactly, blood and warning, innocence purchased only by faithful speech. Paul read Ezekiel 3 as his own job description. Then verse 28 hands the watch to the overseers God has set over the flock: the watchman's office did not retire with the prophets; it was folded into the pastoral office of the Church, and by extension into every baptized person with someone in their care. The charge in tonight's passage is, in a real sense, addressed to this room.

7. In 4:4-6 Ezekiel is told to lie on his side and bear the punishment of the house of Israel, a day for each year. He is not guilty of those years. What can one innocent man lying there actually accomplish, and what might it point toward?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

By itself, nothing juridical: Ezekiel's bearing is a sign, not an atonement. He makes the invisible visible, the sheer accumulated weight of the people's sin, measured out day by day on one man's body, so that no one can pretend the debt is small. But the gesture points beyond itself. Israel's Scriptures will speak of a Servant on whom the LORD lays the iniquity of us all, and the New Testament will say of Christ that he bore our sins in his body. The clean formulation to give the group: Ezekiel carries the sign; Christ carries the substance. Be careful not to collapse the two, because the difference is the gospel.

Dig Deeper

Read Isaiah 53:4-6 and 1 Peter 2:24 side by side with Ezekiel 4:4-6. What can the Servant do that the prophet cannot?

8. Read 4:9-17 again, especially the exchange in verses 14-15. The rations dramatize the siege, but something else happens in that exchange. Ezekiel objects to one detail of the command, and God responds. What does that little dialogue reveal about God?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The rations preach scarcity, about eight ounces of mongrel bread and a splash of water a day, siege food, eaten with trembling; and the unclean cooking fuel preaches exile, bread made unclean among the nations. But the exchange is the treasure. Ezekiel protests from conscience that he has never defiled himself, and God adjusts the sign: cow's dung instead. The God who commands hard things is not deaf to the man he commands. He hears a servant's conscience and bends the assignment without abandoning it. Anyone in the room who thinks obedience to God means the death of dialogue with God has just watched the counterexample.

Dig Deeper

Centuries later another man on a rooftop objects to a command about unclean food in almost the same words. Read Acts 10:14 next to Ezekiel 4:14 and enjoy the echo, then notice how differently the two scenes resolve, and why.

The Hair and the Verdict (5:1-17)

9. In 5:1-4 the prophet's own hair becomes the population of Jerusalem. Trace the fate of each third. Then look closely at verse 3: what happens there, and why might that small detail matter?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. What do the three thirds stand for?

Depth. Why does God so often work through a remnant rather than a majority?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A third burned in the city, plague and famine inside the walls; a third struck with the sword around it; a third scattered to the wind with a sword unsheathed after them. Verses 12 and following decode it explicitly. But verse 3: a few hairs, taken and bound in the skirt of the garment. A small remnant, kept close, carried on the prophet's own body. Even from those, verse 4 says, some go into the fire; the remnant is not a loophole, it is a mercy. Hold onto that image of the few kept in the hem. This book has plans for the remnant.

10. Verse 5 gives the verdict its ground: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations. Read 5:5-8. Why is Jerusalem judged more severely than the nations around her, and what does that tell us about privilege in God's economy?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Jerusalem was placed at the center on purpose, elected to be a display of God's ways to the nations, and she used the position to out-rebel the pagans (verses 6-7 say she was more turbulent than the nations around her). Election never lowered the stakes; it raised them. This principle runs straight through the Bible: to whom much is given, much will be required (Luke 12:48), and judgment begins with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17). For a Catholic room this lands close to home: sacraments, Scripture, and two thousand years of teaching are not a cushion. They are a

commission, and tonight's whole passage is about what happens when the commissioned go quiet.

Putting It Together

11. Last question. Go back through the night and count: how many ways has God used Ezekiel's body as the message? What is God telling Israel, and us, about how he communicates?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

At least five: his mouth (shut, then opened only for God's words), his posture (bound in his house, lying on his side), his side bearing the measured years, his diet (siege rations, eaten in public), and his hair (shaved, weighed, divided). The word of God is not floating above the world as pure information; it takes hold of flesh and preaches through it. That is the instinct behind the whole sacramental life of the Church, where God still insists on reaching spirits through bodies, water, oil, bread, hands. And it points toward the moment the pattern was made perfect, when the message and the messenger became one person. Ezekiel is a signpost on that road. Send the group home with the question the passage leaves open: if God's messengers preach with their bodies and their lives, what is my life currently preaching?

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Is there someone in your life you have been staying silent with, not out of gentleness, but out of fear? What would a faithful, loving warning even look like there?

S2. If your friends could only read your life this month, not hear your words, what would it be telling them about God?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Choose one honest conversation you have been avoiding and take one concrete step toward it this week: schedule the coffee, write the message, or, if the moment is truly not right, write out what you would say and pray it daily until it is.
2. Make an examination of conscience one evening with a single question: what warning from God, through Scripture, a homily, a friend, or my own conscience, have I been politely ignoring? If it points to something serious, bring it to confession this week.
3. Once this week, eat one deliberately plain, simple meal, and while you eat it, pray for people in exile today: refugees, the imprisoned, anyone far from home, and for the courage to speak truth in love.
4. Memorize Ezekiel 3:17 and say it each morning as a question: whom has God set me to watch over today?

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 3:17

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me."

Ezekiel 3:17

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you made a man's silence, his posture, his bread, and his hair into your word. Make our lives legible. Where you have given us someone to warn, give us courage and gentleness in equal measure, and free us from the tyranny of results, for the outcomes belong to you. Bind us like the hairs in the hem of your garment, and keep us close through every fire. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Ezekiel 3:16-27** watchman charge; binding and muteness
- **Ezekiel 4:1-17** brick, iron plate, lying on sides, rations
- **Ezekiel 5:1-17** hair sign; verdict on Jerusalem

Watchman background (leader reference)

- **Jeremiah 6:17**
- **Habakkuk 2:1**
- **Isaiah 62:6**

Discovery

- **Acts 20:26-28** Paul's Miletus farewell; the charge passes to the Church's overseers

Dig Deeper and supporting

- **Isaiah 53:4-6** the Servant bears iniquity really
- **1 Peter 2:24** he bore our sins in his body
- **Acts 10:14** Peter's echo of Ezekiel 4:14
- **Luke 12:48** much given, much required
- **1 Peter 4:17** judgment begins with the household of God
- **John 10:28; 1 John 2:19** texts cited in the steelman objection

Sign-act genre (leader reference)

- **Isaiah 20:1-4**
- **Jeremiah 13:1-11**
- **Jeremiah 19:1-13**
- **Hosea 1:2-9**

Terms

- ***tsopheh***. watchman, sentry; the one posted to see danger far off and sound the warning
- ***ben adam***. son of man; God's constant address to Ezekiel, stressing his creatureliness
- ***oth***. sign; the label 4:3 puts on the brick, and on the whole embodied sermon

Catechism

- **CCC 1146**. spiritual realities through bodily signs
- **CCC 1829**. fraternal correction as a demand of charity
- **CCC 1868**. responsibility for others' sins through culpable silence
- **CCC 2447**. instructing and advising as spiritual works of mercy