

Reading Guide for Ezekiel 33

Chapter 33 introduces the third and final part of the book of Ezekiel (chs. 33-48) which focuses on theme of hope and future restoration. The chapter is made up of three distinct units (as noted below). The first (33:1-20) functions as a sort of “second commission” to Ezekiel to “sound the warning” to the exiles in order that they take heed and turn to the Lord for salvation. The second unit (vv. 21-22) recounts the arrival of a fugitive from Jerusalem who brings news to the exiles that the city has fallen, both vindicating Ezekiel’s former prophecies and ushering in a new theme for the messages that will follow. Finally, the third unit (vv. 23-33) reassures the exiles that it is they that will inherit the land, and not those who remained in Judah.

A CALL TO HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD, TO TURN, AND LIVE (33:1-20)

Message-reception Formula (33:1)

THE PROPHETIC WARNING (33:2-11)

This undated unit begins with a parable about a watchman—if he sounds a warning to the people about imminent danger, and they refuse to heed it, they themselves are to blame. We learn that Ezekiel is that watchman who is commissioned again to warn the people. But this unit has a positive outlook. The exiles need not face any further judgment or condemnation. Despite objections to the contrary, the Lord affirms that He will bless the sinner who repents.

Oracle to the People: The Parable of the Watchman (33:2-6)

Command to Speak to the People (v. 2a)

The Guilt of Those who Refuse to Heed the Warning (vv. 2b-5)

The Guilt on the Watchmen who Does Not Sound a Warning (v. 6)

Oracle to Ezekiel: A Call to Warn the People (33:7-9)

Disputation Oracle: “How Can We Live?” (33:10-11)

Command to Speak to the House of Israel (v. 10a)

The People’s False Thesis: “The People Are Destined to Rot Away and Die” (v. 10b)

The Dispute: The Lord Desires That the Wicked Turn and Live (v. 11a)

Counter-Thesis: Turn and Live (v. 11b)

HOPE FOR THE SINNER THROUGH FAITH AND OBEDIENCE (33:12-20)

This next section continues the theme that the future of the exiles lies in their current actions. Judgment on the exiles is not inevitable or unchangeable; if they turn to the Lord, even the worst sinner who repents will be forgiven and live. Thus, there is hope for the exiles despite their past. As in the previous section, there is an objection. God is called unfair in overlooking past righteousness and forgiving sinners. In reply, the Lord says *they* are not fair and reaffirms His righteous judgment.

Oracle to the People: The Offer of Life to the Repentant Sinner (33:12-16)

Command to Speak to the House of Israel (v. 12a)

The Irrelevance of Past Behavior for Current Judgment (v. 12b)

When the Formerly Righteous Turns to Sin, They will Die (v. 13)

When the Formerly Wicked Turns to Righteousness, They will Live (vv. 14-16)

Disputation: “The Way of the Lord is Not Right” (33:17-20)

The People’s False Thesis: “The Way of the Lord is Not Right” (v. 17ab)

The Dispute: The Peoples’ Way is Not Right (v. 17c)

Counter-Thesis: The People’s Actions Determine Their Fate (vv. 18-19)

Restatement of the People’s False Thesis (v. 20a)

Restatement of the Counter-Thesis (v. 20b)

NEWS OF JERUSALEM'S FALL COMES TO THE EXILES (33:21-22)

This short narrative is dated after Jerusalem's fall. It is significant because it records the moment when the news came to the exiles about the destruction of the city. This news vindicates Ezekiel's earlier prophecies, which had been disputed by the false prophets and some of the leaders among the exiles. In addition, the Lord removes Ezekiel's muteness, a restriction he had lived with for almost a decade (3:26).

THE EXILES WILL BE THE ONES TO POSSESS THE LAND (33:23-33)

Message-reception Formula (33:23)

THE POSSESSION OF THE LAND (33:24-29)

The first oracle exposes the false hope of those remaining in Judah that it is they who will inherit the land. Because they continue in idolatry, violence, and immorality, they will not possess it. Conversely, it is the exiles in Babylon that will eventually return to re-possess the land. This adds further reassurance to the exiles of their hopeful future under the favor of the Lord.

Disputation Concerning the Possession of the Land (33:24-26)

What the Survivors in the Land of Judah are Saying (v. 24)

The Lord's Counter-Thesis: Their Actions Have Disqualified Them (vv. 25-26)

The People Remaining in Judah will Face Further Judgment (33:27-29)

Pronouncement of Judgment on Those who Remained in the Land (vv. 27-28)

Recognition Formula, with Further Proof (v. 29)

JUDGMENT ON THOSE AMONG THE EXILES WHO DO NOT HEED THE PROPHET (33:30-33)

Now that Ezekiel has been vindicated, everyone wants to hear what he has to say next. The problem is that all they want to do is *hear*. If they do not act, but only continue to hear, a new judgment will inevitably come.