

THE MISSION ASSIGNED TO THE PROPHET OF GOD: DEVOUR, DIGEST AND PROCLAIM GOD'S WORD EZEKIEL 02:08–03:15

Introduction

What is the most important mission or task, on earth? Is it serving as the leader of the most powerful nation? Or being responsible for the most powerful army in the world? Or overseeing the strongest economy? Or producing some of the basic necessities of life? Or discovering the cure for the diseases that plague the world? There are so many tasks that are absolutely essential for the survival of the human race that perhaps it is impossible to pinpoint the most important mission.

Surely one of the most important tasks God ever gave someone was the mission He assigned to the prophet Ezekiel. God chose this prophet to share His Word with a world of unbelievers who were dooming themselves to eternal judgment because of their wicked behaviour. This Scripture is the LORD's official commission of Ezekiel to be His prophet. Here, He assigns Ezekiel seven specific tasks. This is, *The Mission Assigned to the Prophet of God: A Sevenfold Task*, Ezekiel 2:1-3:27.

- I. He must know that he is a "son of man": human, weak, frail (v. 2:1).
- II. He must arise and listen to God (v. 2:1).
- III. He must receive and be filled (empowered) with God's Spirit (v. 2:2).
- IV. He must go and share God's Word (vv. 2:3-5).
- V. He must not fear opposition: emphasized three times (vv. 2:6-7).
- VI. He must devour and digest God's Word (vv. 2:8-3:3)
- VII. He must proclaim God's Word (vv. 3:4-27).

I. *Ezekiel 02:08–03:03 He Must Devour and Digest God's Word*

The prophet of God was to devour and digest God's Word. God issued a strong warning to the prophet: he must not rebel against God's Word as others had. On the contrary, he must eat and digest everything God said. Of course, this is figurative language. To eat God's Word means to hear, read, study, meditate upon, receive and apply it. Ezekiel was to eat and digest the Word of God and assimilate it into his heart and life. Once he had digested God's Word, it would permeate his being, energizing him to carry out the task God had given him.

Note that the specific scroll or portion of God's Word, that Ezekiel was to digest concerned God's coming judgment (vv. 9-10). The scroll was written on both sides, leaving no room for personal opinion. It was the prophet's task to proclaim the Word of God and it alone. Ezekiel was not being sent forth to proclaim his or anyone else's

opinions or a message that offered false hope to the people. Both sides of the scroll were completely filled with the pronouncement of coming judgment upon the people. Words of lament, mourning and woe filled the scroll.

God gave Ezekiel an unmistakable charge (3:1). He was to eat and digest God's message of impending doom, and then he was to take the message to the house of Israel. Imagine a prophet beginning a new ministry by preaching message after message on God's coming judgment. This was the difficult mission God gave Ezekiel. Nevertheless, the newly called prophet was obedient to God's call. He ate the scroll of God's Word that emphasized judgment. Eating and digesting the message of the coming judgment was so important that God gave Ezekiel the explicit charge again (v. 3). And again, Ezekiel obedience is emphasized. He ate and found that the message was satisfying, as sweet as honey.

Mat 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Acts 20:32 Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

2 Tim 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

1 Pet 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Rev 10:8-10 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but 'in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.'" "I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour.

Deut 8:3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Job 23:12 I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.

Psa 19:9-10 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

Psa 119:103 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Jer 15:16 When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.

Ezek 3:1-3 And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. 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.

II. *Ezekiel 03:04–15 He Must Proclaim God’s Word*

The prophet of God was to proclaim God’s Word to the world. God called Ezekiel to minister not only to the captives in Babylon, but also to the Jews who had been scattered all over the world by their conquerors. Although it is not mentioned in this particular passage, he was also being sent to all the nations of the world (see notes, Ezk 25:1-32:32). A quick glance at the present Scripture reveals Ezekiel’s fourfold calling. He was called to be God’s...

- *special messenger*
- *burdened spokesman*
- *faithful watchman*
- *submissive servant*

Thought 1. Believers are to devour and digest God’s Word. We are to study, meditate upon, learn and live out the Word of God day by day. God’s Word is to govern our behaviour and even our thoughts. We must learn God’s commandments and keep them by living righteously and being a strong testimony for the LORD. Listen to what God says about hungering for and feeding upon His Word:

1. The prophet Ezekiel was to proclaim God’s Word as His special messenger (vv. 4-9). God gave Ezekiel the very special mission of reaching his fellow Jewish exiles, even though they were hard-hearted and stiff-necked against God. If God had sent Ezekiel to a foreign land where people spoke an obscure language, his task would have been difficult enough, but not nearly as difficult as trying to reach the Jews. Ezekiel could reach foreigners faster than he could the Jews. The LORD warned Ezekiel in no uncertain terms that the Jewish people would not listen to his message because they had rejected God’s Holy Word. Their hearts were too stubborn, hardened and obstinate to heed His message.

Nevertheless, Ezekiel could rest assured that the LORD would prepare him to stand against all the opposition thrown against him (vv. 8-9). God would give him a spirit of perseverance and a mind of iron determination. Ezekiel would become more unyielding in the cause of righteousness than the Jews were in their wicked behaviour and unbelief. Furthermore, God would make the prophet’s forehead (mind) harder than the hardest stone, far more determined in the cause of God than the people were in their wickedness.

In light of these promises of God's sustaining power, the prophet was to be courageous and fearless. Despite the people's rebellion, Ezekiel could rest assured of God's presence and power. God was calling him to be a very special messenger; therefore, He would equip the prophet in a very special way to fulfil his ministry.

2. The prophet Ezekiel was to proclaim God's Word as His burdened spokesman (vv. 10-15). God gave Ezekiel a charge that is a prerequisite for serving the LORD. Unless people obey this charge, they cannot be true servants of the LORD. What is the charge? The prophet had to receive God's Word into his heart; he had to learn and do everything that God said. Of course, this involves obeying God's holy commandments and living righteously, as well as being a strong witness for the LORD. People cannot go forth as God's messengers unless they open up their heart to God's Word. This charge implies continuous action. The prophet was to keep on learning and obeying God's Word. Day by day he had to seek the LORD and listen to His Word. Once Ezekiel had received God's Word in his heart, he was to go forth and proclaim God's message to the exiles. Whether they listened or not, he was to be faithful in proclaiming God's Holy Word to them.

Throughout this passage God has been warning Ezekiel to expect opposition and persecution. The LORD knew that this would cause Ezekiel to shrink back from his calling, so He gave the future prophet great assurance (vv. 12-14a). Remember that Ezekiel had been seeking the LORD somewhere along the bank of the river Kedar when the LORD confronted him, called him, and gave him the wonderful vision of God's glory. Then the LORD's Spirit suddenly transported Ezekiel back to the Jewish settlement at Tel Aviv on the Kedar. As he was being transported, he heard a great thunderous voice behind him shouting a song of praise to God. He also heard the wings of the living beings brushing against each other and the rumbling sound of the wheels. Despite these confirmations of God's glory and power, Ezekiel was not enthusiastic about answering God's call (v. 14). The prospect of overwhelming opposition doubtless weighed so heavily upon him that he felt totally inadequate. Discouragement, distress, anguish and turmoil gripped his heart. His soul was in so much turmoil that he became bitter about being called to such a difficult ministry. How could he possibly spend the rest of his life facing such opposition? Why would the LORD call him to emphasize the sins of the people and the coming judgment when He already knew that they were not going to repent?

After the Spirit of God returned him to the settlement at Tel Aviv, Ezekiel continued to struggle with God's call upon his life. He had great difficulty surrendering to a ministry that would never be considered successful in the eyes of people. Such a call from God just overwhelmed his soul. But note where the LORD had taken Ezekiel: back to the settlement, where he would be brushing shoulders with the Jewish captives while making his decision. Seven days in their presence would show him

that they were in the grip of sin and without hope of ever being set free from their captivity. He would begin to see how desperately they needed to be saved from sin and from the misery and hopelessness of their captivity. Ezekiel knew that only the LORD could save and deliver His people. Realizing the people's desperate need and the burdens of their souls, Ezekiel would begin to be burdened for them. He would see the consequences of their wicked behaviour: the guilt, sorrow, misery, anger, hostility, broken relationships and all the other consequences that afflict the wicked of the earth. Feeling their suffering and pain, Ezekiel would more readily surrender to God's call. ■