International Bible Lessons Commentary
Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series
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Ezekiel 3:1-11
New American Standard Bible
July 23, 2017

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, July 23, 2017**, is from **Ezekiel 3:1-11**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Lessons Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Lesson Forum*.

(Ezekiel 3:1) Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel."

Ezekiel became a prophet when he was thirty years old. Like Jeremiah, he was from a priest's family, but he could not be consecrated a priest outside the temple in Jerusalem. In 597 BC, he was taken to Babylon with the first group of exiles. He began to prophecy in 593 BC (and did so until 571 BC). He preached that the Judeans would not return quickly to Jerusalem as they anticipated, and the temple and the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed because the people would not repent of their sins. The scroll he ate contained the words of God; words of lamentation and mourning and woe (see Ezekiel 2:10).

(Ezekiel 3:2) So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll.

Ezekiel obeyed God and ate the scroll that had writing on the front and back. The words were the words of God given directly to Ezekiel by God. He was to speak these words to the people in exile, and perhaps his words were also recorded and sent to Jerusalem where Jeremiah was preaching the same message. The words and predictions of the prophets came true in 586 BC when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and carried more people into exile in Babylon.

(Ezekiel 3:3) He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.

Ezekiel was commanded to eat all the words of God rather than select from among them and preach what he wanted to preach. He was to fill himself and completely digest the words of God to perfectly understand them and repeat them. He was to internalize the words of God and make them a part of himself. Then, the words of God would become a part of his total being and way of life; totally filling him and influencing all his thoughts, words, and actions. He would act out the words of God in symbolic ways to make the words of God understandable to more people. The words of God are sweet as honey when studied, even when they record and warn about the just judgment of God. God's words are sweet as honey because God's words are true and God keeps all His promises. God's words are saving and sweet to those who will trust them and act accordingly.

(Ezekiel 3:4) Then He said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.

The people of Israel included the exiles that were scattered when the Assyrians destroyed the Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, and those placed in exile and yet to be placed in exile from the Kingdom of Judah in 587 BC when Jerusalem was destroyed. Only after Ezekiel had totally taken the words of God into himself was he able to speak to God's people; he was to go to them totally prepared to reveal and do the will of God.

(Ezekiel 3:5) "For you are not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, but to the house of Israel,

On the one hand, Ezekiel's immediate task would be easy. Unlike Jonah, who had to preach in Nineveh to Assyrians, Ezekiel was to preach to the people of Israel in a language that both they and he understood. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, Ezekiel would preach words of judgment on Egypt and some of the other nations that surrounded the Kingdom of Judah.

(Ezekiel 3:6) nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to them who should listen to you;

As he preached, Jonah discovered that the Ninevites immediately repented and turned to God to save them, and God did save them. The other prophets that God sent to the Kingdom of Israel; such as Hosea and Amos, did not succeed in leading Israel to repent. Ezekiel knew the story of Jonah and probably also about the unsuccessful preaching of

the prophets in the Kingdom of Israel. God told Ezekiel that if he sent him to a foreign land that people would listen to him, just as the Ninevites had listened to Jonah.

(Ezekiel 3:7) yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate.

The Israelites included those who had lived in the Kingdom of Israel, those who still lived in the Kingdom of Judah before its destruction, and those currently in exile in Babylon with Ezekiel. Only a very few would listen to Ezekiel when he preached to the exiles as only a very few listened to Jeremiah in Jerusalem. They would not listen to the prophets because they would not listen to God. They had become like Pharaoh in Egypt in the days of Moses, when Pharaoh hardened his heart rather than obey God. They had continually hardened their hearts against God every time He called them to return to obedience; therefore, God needed to justly punish them to lead them to repentance.

(Ezekiel 3:8) "Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces and your forehead as hard as their foreheads.

No matter what God said or did, the Israelites refused to obey God or trust in God. They preferred their idols, their immoral practices, and their alliances with foreign nations to protect them from the Babylonians. God told Ezekiel that he would give him the courage, strength, and stamina to stand against His rebellious hardhearted people.

(Ezekiel 3:9) "Like emery harder than flint I have made your forehead. Do not be afraid of them or be dismayed before them, though they are a rebellious house."

God would make Ezekiel just as stubborn and more so than those he would warn of coming judgment. They would rebel against Ezekiel and his preaching just as they rebelled against all of God's prophets when they called them to repent and obey God. But God commanded Ezekiel not to be afraid of them, because He was sending him and he would be speaking the words of God to them. God told Ezekiel in advance that he would not succeed in leading the people to turn back to God; therefore, Ezekiel would know that he had not failed God. God would fulfill his words of warning, and later generations would learn to trust in God's words.

(Ezekiel 3:10) Moreover, He said to me, "Son of man, take into your heart all My words which I will speak to you and listen closely.

God wanted Ezekiel to fully understand His words of warning to Israel so he would

repeat them accurately: nothing was to be added to or omitted from them. Ezekiel was to take God's words to heart, submit to them, and live according to God's words and law. He was not to say one thing and do another, but serve as a living example of obedience to God. God advised Ezekiel on how the people would receive him and how he should respond to their hostile rejection of God and him. No matter how they responded to him, God commanded Ezekiel to keep speaking his words of truth and warning. If he did not, their blood would be on his hands. If he did, their blood would be on their hands.

(Ezekiel 3:11) "Go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.'"

God wanted Ezekiel to remind them that He was their Creator and the Supreme Ruler over all creation and all people. God emphasized again that Ezekiel would be preaching to the ones already in exile and to the ones who would come into exile after 587 BC. He would speak words of warning until his words came true and Jerusalem was destroyed. Then, after Jerusalem was destroyed, he would speak words of hope and encouragement about returning home and a second temple. Just as Jeremiah preached in Jerusalem, whether the people listened or not, Ezekiel was to keep preaching whether anyone believed him and heeded his warnings or not. The judgments God's people received were the consequences of their repeated failures to listen to God and His prophets when God gave them every opportunity to repent and return to Him for salvation.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Read Ezekiel 2:10. What was the content of the scroll Ezekiel was to eat?

2. When eating the scroll, what do the commands eat, fill your stomach, listen carefully, and take to heart imply Ezekiel was to do with the words of God?

3. Why do God's words taste as sweet as honey to you?

4. What kind of people did God command Ezekiel to speak to and warn?

5. What did God do to help Ezekiel preach to the exiles in Babylon?

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