

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

Ezekiel 2:1-5

Verses 1,2

**He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet and I shall speak to you.” The Spirit came upon me as he addressed me and set me on my feet and I heard him speaking to me.**

This passage deals with the commission God gave to Ezekiel. In chapter 1, Ezekiel sees a vision of God above a great expanse of crystal like ice. Below were the four creatures that have command over the four corners of the world. Above was one like a man in flaming metal from a furnace, sitting on his throne. Ezekiel fell to his face as if paralyzed in fear and wonder.

God spoke to Ezekiel and commanded him to get to his feet so that he could address him with his word. **I will speak with you** אתך ואדבר is the divine gift of revelation offered by the Lord to his prophet. God is personal and he communicates to his people through the prophet despite being transcendent and clothed in glory and power. Up to this point, Ezekiel had witnessed visions but the word from the lips of God conveyed power and action, what the Lord does in history, particularly amongst his people. **Stand on your feet** עמד רגליך על suggests that God is speaking to an equal or that he does not wish his servant to grovel before him. Perhaps it is the correct posture for receiving instructions and the life-giving word of God. Ezekiel is to stand ready to act on the word for it is God addressing him.

Verses 3,4

**He said to me, “I am sending you to the people of Israel, who are like rebellious non-Jews, they and their ancestors. They have transgressed against me to this very day. The people are obdurate and have set their hearts against me. I am sending you to them and this is what you will say: ‘Thus says the Lord Yahweh.’”**

**Son of man** is used again (see verse 1) and indicates the contrast between the prophet and God. He is a representative of mortal humankind but the Lord is transcendent and eternal. But by addressing the prophet frequently by this term (in Ezekiel over 90 times but only once outside of this book in Daniel 8:17) it became a title as it did for our Lord, who during his ministry referred to himself as the *son of man*. For Jesus, such a title had a link to the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel but it went beyond the prophetic office of a man being addressed by God to being a messianic figure, the ideal Israel in one person.

God sends Ezekiel to **a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me**. **Nation**, גוים is normally used of non-Jewish nations, Gentiles, unclean non-believers. The Lord considers that the basis of the covenant was broken by the children of Israel from the time of their salvation, the exodus from Egypt, to the last king, hence **to this very day**, literally **to the bone of this very day**. Bone denotes the substance of the creature and infers that Israel was essentially a rebel. God declared himself to be their God, that is, to deliver and provide for them and on their part, they were to follow his commandments (Exodus 20:2-17). Yet their forebears, right up to the present generation, refused to maintain this covenant of grace and love of God for his troublesome people. **They transgressed against the Lord** בי פשעו, meaning, they broke the stipulations of the covenant.

Ezekiel's task was a difficult one and the offense that God felt would in part be experienced by the prophet. The expression, **I am sending you**, in the participle form with first person pronoun, conveys an unbroken, continuous action on the part of the Lord. Certainly, the prophet's work will be an on-going one but will reveal God's mission proceeding from his grace. Though Israel was rebellious at heart, the Lord was gracious at heart, willing to keep reaching out to his stubborn people, to face rejection over and over again.

But why send another prophet to a nation continuously rebelling? The people to whom the Lord sends Ezekiel are literally **hard of face and hard of heart**. Their minds and hearts are obdurate, like stone. They have reached the stage where each additional word of the gospel **firms their**

**resistance** **הִתְקַי** to the Lord. One is reminded of the Pharaoh's hardened heart and those who crucified our Lord. God does not harden a person's heart. Human beings do this to themselves as they continue to reject what they know to be the truth. As the Lord appeals to them over again with his grace, their rejection becomes entrenched. See Hebrews 10:26,27,29 for the fearful situation of those who knowingly reject the Saviour having first of all received him. Today's society is very similar to what Ezekiel faced and also what early Christians faced (see Ephesians 4:17-19).

However, God's word is firmer and more persistent. The opening phrase of the prophet will be, **thus says the Lord Yahweh**. **יהוה אדני אמר כה** is the standard formula for the prophets as they deliver the message of the Lord. God's word is a revelation and a gift. Through it the people of Israel could know the Lord and enter into a deeper fellowship with him. It was also a pronouncement that had to be acted upon. Of course, false prophets could use this very formula to give false messages an aura of genuineness. But the solution to this problem was straight forward. The word had to pass two tests. First it had to be in line with Israel's faith, with the historic saving acts of God to redeem Israel from slavery, grant land and law through the covenant and establish the messianic kingdom of which the kings of Israel were forerunners according to the promise given to King David. Secondly, it had to come true. False prophets tended to proclaim victory and peace while the true prophets proclaimed the hard message of justice for the oppressed and judgement on those who broke the covenant.

Man's refusal never negates the work of God to continually call his people to repentance. We ask, "why God would bother?" The answer is obvious. God is inextricably bound to those whom he loves and we see the same behaviour in our Saviour who sought the lost and ate with sinners. He never withdrew his saving word and call to repentance.

Verse 5

**Whether they listen or cease listening, for they are a rebellious house, they will know that a prophet of Yahweh is in their midst.**

The house of Israel may listen and obey (the word for listen can mean obey) or may cease to listen; either way the Lord's purpose and divine plan has not failed. On the contrary, **they will know that a prophet was in their midst**. Though Israel is a **rebellious house** and the Lord knows that the prospects of success are slim, God's word has never-the-less evoked a response. People have to understand what they reject, very much like the parable of the seeds in Matthew 13:19. The seed was sown in the heart; through the word the Holy Spirit revealed Christ to the hearer but to grasp hold of the revelation and come to repentance fails because of hardness of heart. It is exactly like sewing seed on a footpath. Jesus understood the hardness of the ground (see Matthew 13:11-17). Thus, God succeeds in sewing the seed but people immediately rebel against the message.

The prophet Ezekiel, in this situation, becomes not only a sign of grace but a sign of judgement. A spurned invitation becomes an indictment against those who reject the Lord. Again, we are reminded of our Lord's rejection and the many parables about the supposed failure of the invitation (Luke 14:15-24). God's word is law and gospel; gospel to those convicted of their sins and law to those smugly complacent in their sins. The prophet therefore will pronounce a stinging rebuke as we know from later chapters and from earlier prophets. The prophet will not be afraid of the people or try to preserve his reputation. His allegiance is to the Lord and therefore he will tell them a word that will expose their sin and when they expect approval will receive condemnation. For God's thoughts are not our thoughts and his word goes against all of our natural thinking about ourselves, especially our supposed goodness (Isaiah 55:8).