

Homiletics Analysis: Ezekiel 2:1–10

Content & Intent

This Text — Content:

Ezekiel 2 records the divine commissioning of Ezekiel as a prophet to Israel. Following the overwhelming theophanic vision of chapter 1, the LORD addresses the prostrate Ezekiel as “son of man” — a form of address that simultaneously honors him as a recipient of divine speech and marks his creaturely smallness before the sovereign God. The Spirit enters him and sets him on his feet to receive his charge. The commission is bracing in its honesty: Ezekiel is being sent not to a receptive people but to a rebellious nation — a people who have transgressed against God, who are impudent and stubborn, and whose fathers before them had the same character. God does not promise success, only faithfulness: whether they hear or refuse to hear, they will know a prophet has been among them. Ezekiel is warned not to fear them, not to be dismayed by their words or their looks, and not to be a rebel like them. The chapter closes with the remarkable image of a hand extended toward him holding a scroll, which when unrolled is written on both sides — front and back — with words of lamentation, mourning, and woe. The scroll is the content of everything he will be required to speak.

This Text — Intent:

God is seeking to steel Ezekiel — and through him, every servant of the Word — against the twin temptations of discouragement and capitulation when the message is unwelcome and the audience is hostile. The intent is not merely to inform Ezekiel of his task but to form in him the kind of fearless, non-calculating obedience that preaches faithfully regardless of outcome. God is making the point, with deliberate force, that prophetic faithfulness is measured not by reception but by fidelity. He is also, through the scroll, impressing on Ezekiel that the message he carries is not his own — it comes from outside him, pressed into him, and it is a hard message before it is ever a hopeful one.

Subject Sentence: The LORD commissions a prophet to a rebellious people, measuring faithfulness by fidelity rather than results.

Primary Claim: God sends His servant not where the harvest is easy but where the rebellion is deep — and what He requires is not success but unintimidated, non-negotiating faithfulness to the word placed in the servant’s hand.

Interpretive Evaluation

The commission structure and its implications: Some readers treat the commission in Ezekiel 2 primarily as an account of Ezekiel's personal call experience — valuable for understanding the prophet's psychology or religious biography but not directly generative of normative claims for ministry. This reading tends to confine the passage's force to its historical-biographical context. The Reformed reading resists this. The commission is not merely descriptive of Ezekiel's experience; it is formative of a pattern of prophetic ministry that runs from Moses through the writing prophets into the New Testament. The call narrative establishes the normative anatomy of speaking God's word to resistant audiences — and the New Testament explicitly draws on this pattern for the apostolic commission and by extension the ongoing ministry of the Word (cf. Acts 26:16-18, where Paul's commission echoes Ezekiel's; cf. 2 Cor. 2:15-17 on the sufficiency of faithful proclamation regardless of reception). This passage warrants normative application because it is not a private transaction but a paradigmatic commissioning.

The phrase “whether they hear or refuse to hear”: Arminian and Wesleyan interpreters may emphasize this phrase as evidence that the human response is the decisive variable in the prophetic transaction — God sends the word, but the outcome depends entirely on human receptivity. The phrase is real, and human response is genuinely in view. However, the Reformed reading notes that the phrase is deployed here not to underscore human freedom as the ultimate determinant but to *liberate the prophet from outcomes he cannot control*. God is not teaching Ezekiel a doctrine of human free will; He is relieving Ezekiel of a burden He never assigned him. The purpose of the phrase is to anchor prophetic faithfulness in the act of speaking rather than in the result of being heard. The sovereignty of God over Israel's history (which is precisely what the throne-chariot vision of chapter 1 establishes) is the ground on which the commission rests, not a concession to human autonomy as the ultimate variable.

The scroll “written on both sides”: Some interpreters have read the scroll written front and back as a symbol of abundance — the richness and completeness of the divine revelation. The image is striking and the interpretation is not impossible. However, the text specifies what is written: *lamentation, mourning, and woe*. The emphasis is on the weight and density of the judgment message, not on its richness. The scroll is full — yes — but full of hard things. This guards against a softening of the commissioning that would emphasize only the privilege of divine speech without the severity of the content. The Reformed reading honors both: the word comes from God, it is authoritative and must be received and eaten (chapter 3), but it arrives in a specific historical moment as predominantly a message of judgment on a nation that has exhausted God's patience.

No significant divergence on the Spirit entering Ezekiel and setting him on his feet — this is broadly read across traditions as the enabling of the prophet for his task. The Reformed emphasis notes that even the capacity to stand, receive, and speak is sovereignly given, not generated from within the prophet.

Key Canonical Support

- **Isaiah 6:1–13** — The paradigmatic prophetic commission. Isaiah, like Ezekiel, encounters God’s overwhelming holiness, is undone, is cleansed, and is then sent to a people who will not hear. The commission explicitly includes the “whether they hear or not” framework: Isaiah’s ministry is declared in advance to produce hardening. This is not an aberration but the pattern of faithful prophetic ministry in a resistant age.
- **Jeremiah 1:4–10** — Jeremiah’s commission directly parallels Ezekiel’s structure: divine address, human inadequacy, divine touch, charge to speak what God gives regardless of the audience’s response. “Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you” (Jer. 1:8) is nearly identical in form and intent to Ezekiel 2’s “do not be afraid of their words.”
- **Acts 26:16–18** — Paul’s Lukan account of his Damascus commission draws explicitly on the Ezekiel commissioning pattern (rising to one’s feet, divine address, sending to a resistant people, the promise of God’s presence and enablement). The New Testament application of the prophetic commissioning to apostolic ministry confirms the normative character of Ezekiel 2’s pattern.
- **2 Corinthians 2:15–17** — Paul’s description of the apostolic ministry as “the aroma of Christ” — a fragrance of life to some and of death to others — carries forward the Ezekiel 2 framework: faithful proclamation is evaluated not by universal reception but by the integrity of the message delivered. The minister is not “peddling the word of God” but speaking with sincerity.
- **Matthew 10:11–14** — Jesus’ commissioning of the twelve, including the instruction to shake the dust off their feet when a town refuses to receive them, directly embodies the “whether they hear or refuse to hear” framework. Faithful sending does not guarantee faithful reception; the servant’s accountability is to the message, not to the result.

Aim: To establish in the reader a conception of ministry faithfulness anchored entirely in the integrity of the word delivered rather than in the receptivity of the audience — and to identify the specific fears God warns against so that they may be confronted and refused.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
2:1	God addresses the prostrate	“Son of man” — Heb. <i>ben</i>

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	Ezekiel as “son of man”; commands him to stand	<i>adam</i> — marks Ezekiel’s creatureliness and dependence; the address is used 93 times in Ezekiel
2:2	The Spirit enters Ezekiel and sets him on his feet; he hears the one speaking to him	Enabling precedes commanding — the Spirit makes possible the obedience required
2:3	The LORD identifies the audience: Israel — nations (plural, likely tribes) that have rebelled against God; rebellion is the defining characteristic	The word “rebelled” (<i>mara’u</i>) signals deliberate, continuous, willful defiance
2:4	Further description: impudent (<i>qesheh panim</i> — hard of face) and stubborn-hearted; God’s response — “I am sending you to them”	The hardness of the audience is not a disqualifier for the commission; it is the context of it
2:5	Whether they hear or refuse to hear, they will know a prophet has been among them	The standard of prophetic faithfulness is presence and speech, not reception; “they will know” — divine accountability is at work
2:6a	“Do not be afraid of them” — first warning against fear	The threefold fear warning (vv. 6, 6, 7) underscores the real temptation; God does not warn against imaginary dangers
2:6b	“Do not be afraid of their words” — specific fears named: briars, thorns, scorpions	Vivid imagery for hostile, painful, and potentially deadly audience reaction
2:6c	“Do not be dismayed by their looks” — the social intimidation of hostile faces	The face of a hostile audience is itself a tool of discouragement; God preemptively addresses it
2:7	“Speak my words to them whether they hear or refuse to hear” — the core	Whether/whether structure marks an unconditional charge; faithfulness is the

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
2:8a	command God addresses Ezekiel directly: “Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house”	standard, not outcome The temptation to accommodate, soften, or suppress is itself a form of rebellion mirroring the audience’s rebellion
2:8b	“Open your mouth and eat what I give you”	The word must be received before it can be given; Ezekiel’s ministry begins with ingestion, not production
2:9	A hand extended toward Ezekiel; in it, a scroll	The word is given from outside — it is not manufactured by the prophet; the extended hand is the LORD’s
2:10	The scroll unrolled — written on front and back with lamentation, mourning, and woe	The fullness of the scroll signals the weight of the message; this is not a partial word or a tentative one

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	2:1–2	The Enabling: The Spirit Sets the Prophet on His Feet
2	2:3–5	The Assignment: Sent to the Rebellious Whether They Hear or Not
3	2:6–7	The Warning: Do Not Fear Them — Speak Anyway
4	2:8–10	The Word: Receive the Scroll Before You Open Your Mouth

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The LORD commissions a prophet to a rebellious people, measuring faithfulness by fidelity rather than results.

Primary Claim: God sends His servant not where the harvest is easy but where the rebellion is deep — and what He requires is not success but unintimidated, non-negotiating faithfulness to the word placed in the servant's hand.

Applications (Five)

- 1.** The measure of faithful ministry is not the response it receives but the integrity with which the word is delivered. Every pastor, teacher, parent, and witness who has labored over a resistant person or congregation and concluded that their faithfulness has failed because the response has been thin is measuring by the wrong instrument. God told Ezekiel in advance that the people might not hear — and then sent him anyway. The question God will ask of every servant of His word is not “did they receive it?” but “did you say it?” Recalibrate your measure of success now, before discouragement teaches you the wrong lesson.
- 2.** The fears God warned Ezekiel against — their faces, their words, their looks — are the exact fears that shut the mouths of God's servants today. The social cost of saying what God has said, the visible disapproval of a hostile audience, the discomfort of being unwelcome — these are not hypothetical dangers but real ones that God pre-emptively addresses because He knows they will come. Sit with the fact that God named these fears specifically and told His servant not to yield to them. He is naming your fears too. The hostility of the audience is not a signal to soften the word; it is precisely the condition in which faithfulness is required.
- 3.** The word Ezekiel received was written on the scroll before it was ever spoken from his mouth — he did not compose it, craft it, or negotiate its content. He received it and ate it. The temptation for every preacher and teacher is to arrive at the text with the application already in mind, shaping the exposition to produce a desired reception rather than allowing the text to produce whatever it will. Ezekiel's model of ministry begins with ingestion — receiving the word as given, however hard its content — before any question of delivery is raised. Ask yourself honestly: is your exposition shaped by what the text says, or by what you expect the congregation to receive?
- 4.** The scroll was written with lamentation, mourning, and woe — and Ezekiel was commanded to eat it. God does not promise that faithful ministry will always carry a sweet or encouraging message. The Reformed tradition has at times overcorrected from a shallow moralism into a shallow encouragement — a preaching that never allows the word to function as lamentation or warning because the congregation is assumed to be already gathered, already saved, already sanctified. Ezekiel's scroll arrives full and hard. Ask whether your reading of this passage and your understanding of your own congregation's condition allows for the possibility that the message for this moment might be one of mourning before it is one of hope.

5. The most penetrating warning in the chapter is the one often overlooked: “Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house.” Ezekiel’s greatest danger is not that the people will intimidate him into silence — it is that he will accommodate their rebellion by softening, suppressing, or adjusting the word. Rebellion in the prophet would mirror the rebellion in the people. Every servant of the Word who dilutes the message to avoid conflict, who omits the hard thing to preserve the relationship, who reframes the warning as suggestion — is exhibiting precisely the behavior God tells Ezekiel to refuse. This is not a peripheral warning. It is the hinge on which the entire commission turns.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Ezekiel 2 reveals a God who is absolutely sovereign over His own word — its origin, its content, its delivery, and its accountability. The LORD does not commission Ezekiel and then leave the outcome to chance or human response; He commissions Ezekiel and declares that whether the people hear or refuse, *they will know a prophet has been among them*. This is a divine accountability that operates independently of human reception. The passage also reveals God’s character in the nature of the commission itself: He does not soften the description of Israel’s condition to make the task seem manageable — He describes them with full candor as rebellious, impudent, and stubborn, and sends His servant in anyway. This is a God who insists on being heard even when He knows He will not be listened to, because faithful proclamation is itself an act of justice, not merely a means toward conversion. Finally, the image of the scroll coming from God’s own hand — not generated by the prophet — establishes the transcendence and authority of the prophetic word: it arrives from outside, it carries its own weight, and the prophet’s task is to receive it faithfully before delivering it faithfully.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Ezekiel 2 is a foundational text for the Reformed doctrine of the Word and its relationship to human response. The “whether they hear or refuse to hear” framework is not a concession to Arminian freedom but a liberation of the faithful preacher from a results-oriented understanding of ministry that would inevitably produce either manipulation (engineering responses) or despair (measuring faithfulness by conversions). The sovereignty of God over both the sending and the accounting means the servant is freed to preach with fidelity and leave the outcome to God — which is precisely what the Reformed tradition’s insistence on the sovereignty of God in salvation is designed to produce in the minister: not passivity, but fearless faithfulness. The scroll written before Ezekiel ever speaks also carries Reformation-era weight: the word has a content that precedes the minister, authorizes the minister, and is not subject to the minister’s revision. The Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* finds a deep prophetic root here — the minister stands under the word, not over it.

Main Takeaway

God is not asking for a ministry that succeeds. He is asking for a ministry that speaks. The word He has given you is already written — your task is to receive it, eat it, and say it to the people in front of you whether they hear or refuse to hear. Stop measuring your faithfulness by their faces. You were not sent to a willing audience. Neither was Ezekiel. Say it anyway.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Confining the application to professional clergy.** The commission is addressed to Ezekiel in his specific prophetic role, but the pattern of faithfully speaking God's word to resistant people is universal — every Christian who witnesses, parents who disciple resistant children, elders who confront sin in the congregation, anyone called to say a hard thing from Scripture to someone who does not want to hear it. Reducing this passage to “the preacher's text” evacuates its force for the majority of the congregation who are themselves called to speak God's word in their spheres.
- **Preaching the commission as an encouragement without honoring the weight of the scroll.** It is tempting to preach Ezekiel 2 as a comforting “God will equip you for hard ministry” text — which it is — while softening or omitting the content of the scroll: lamentation, mourning, and woe. The scroll's content is part of the passage's claim. Ezekiel is not being commissioned to preach good news in a difficult context; he is being commissioned to preach a hard word in a hard context. Preaching that skips the scroll's content in favor of the commissioning's encouragement has not preached the whole passage.
- **Treating “whether they hear or refuse to hear” as a concession to human freedom rather than a liberation of the prophet.** The phrase does not primarily teach a doctrine of human response; it functions rhetorically to cut the cord between the prophet's obedience and his audience's reception. Preaching that turns this phrase into a lesson on the importance of human decision-making has misread the function of the phrase in its context.
- **Missing the self-referential warning in verse 8.** “Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house” is among the most searching warnings in the chapter and is frequently passed over in favor of the more dramatic imagery of the scroll. The danger that the prophet becomes an echo of his audience's rebellion — through accommodation, softening, or selective silence — is a live danger in every generation of ministry. This verse deserves direct treatment, not a passing mention.
- **Disconnecting Ezekiel's commissioning from the throne-chariot vision of chapter 1.** The overwhelming vision of God's sovereign majesty in chapter 1 is the

ground on which the fearless commission of chapter 2 rests. Ezekiel is not told to be unafraid because the task is manageable — he is told to be unafraid because he has just seen who is doing the sending. Preachers who begin their exposition at chapter 2 without anchoring it in the vision of chapter 1 deprive the commission of its foundation. The antidote to the fear of men’s faces is the vision of God’s glory.

- **Flattening the “son of man” address into a mere title.** The ninety-three occurrences of *ben adam* in Ezekiel mark something theologically important: the one being sent is a creature, dependent, frail, and entirely unqualified in himself. The Spirit must enter him; God must set him on his feet; the scroll comes from an external hand. The address “son of man” is a recurring reminder that the authority of the prophetic word rests entirely in its divine origin and not in the prophet’s person or qualifications. Preaching that treats the address as merely a stylistic feature misses the theological humility it is designed to produce.