Ezekiel 2:5 And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them.

 Weren’t those Israelite people just awful! I mean, they had a direct history with the Lord God and here we are in the time of Ezekiel and it is clear that the Lord is not pleased with these people. In our text alone God, did you hear that, God calls them: **“rebellious, obstinate, and stubborn.”** And if you think that is bad, then just go on to verse 6 of this very same chapter. There God says, **“And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briers and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions.”** I mean just listen to the list of words that the Lord uses to describe these people: **“rebellious, obstinate, stubborn, briers, thorns and scorpions.”** I don’t care who you are, these are not good words that the Lord is saying.

 But I want you to be careful. I want you to be careful that you and I don’t act and behave just like these people did and deserve upon us the very same labels from the Lord. Because what was going on among the Israelites at this time is much the same as what is going on in today’s world. Let me just share with you how I think the two societies, though centuries apart, are very much the same.

 First, the Israelites were actually religious people. They were big on rituals, ceremonies, and looking pious. But what they were doing was empty, it had no meaning and purpose. So they worshipped in what looked like the way God told them to, yet in truth it was not. It was not, because what they were teaching was no longer in keeping with the Word of God!

 Second. While they had the word of God among them, they did not really believe it, although they pretended to direct their whole lives according to it. Jesus described the faith they practiced and the people who practiced it with these words found in Matthew 23. **“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them…Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are…Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness…You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?”** Again, you have to understand that what was going on in Ezekiel’s day as far as their faith went, was the very same thing that Jesus 5 centuries later still condemns!

 Third. In almost every instance, the Israelites and their religious leadership had determined to make God fit what they wanted rather than to simply believe what God said. In other words, they liked to twist and contort the Word of God. God spoke of sin and its human depth, they spoke of their righteousness and holiness in life. God gave them sacrifices because it pointed to the Messiah to come, they did sacrifices as proof they were holy. God had said, “Only me,” but they put idols and false gods before themselves and claimed it was God. Though they studied the Bible, in practice, they did not accept and believe the Bible to be the Word of God. So instead of yielding their minds to the Word, they made the Word fit their minds. This is still going on today. God’s Word says that this or that is my way and many faiths say, “No way.”

 Now, did you notice something about what is being pointed out here? In truth, the three things that I gave you as examples here are really interconnected and maybe even the same! It is because the best we can do as children of God and believers in God is hear and follow the clear and plain word of God. And if we refuse to do that, then we put our very souls in jeopardy. It is our duty to make sure that we grasp what God has said is what we believe! And if you want to see the truth of that then let’s simply take a good look at this text to understand the importance of the prophet and the Word. Our theme will be: **THIS IS WHAT THE SOVEREIGN LORD SAYS!**

 Our text is at the beginning of the book of Ezekiel and as you read the entire section you will grasp that our text is that section where God has called Ezekiel to be his prophet. Ezekiel, like many of the Jewish people is an exile. Because of the persistent godlessness of the Jewish people, God has allowed the Babylonian nation to rise up and carry into exile his people. For the past 100 years God told them this would happen unless they changed their ways and got back to him, but as I said, the Jewish people thought they knew better than God did. Let me help you grasp this.

 It is true, God sent his prophets among the people to tell them the truth and to duly record that truth under the absolute verbal inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In other words, there were men who were prophets of God who spoke the truth and the marvel of God for the good of God’s people. So why didn’t the people listen? The false prophets! While you had God’s true prophets teaching you also had hundreds of false prophets teaching just about the opposite! And since (it is the only way I can explain it) there were hundreds verses one, the people went along with and believed the majority rather than listening, watching, weighing and contemplating what really was the truth of God! The people were sheep, really blind sheep who couldn’t, didn’t and wouldn’t take care to measure what was truth and what was not! Again, kind of sounds like the religious world of today! And yet God, as we look at this text, gives us all kinds of strong hints and clues to help us grasp His truth and what is says. Again, let’s look.

 Note the opening words of this text. Ezekiel is just a plain guy, one of the exiled people of God. God appears to him! **“He said to me, ‘Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.’ As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.”** Now there are a couple of very interesting things to note here. None of this is Ezekiel! It is God acting, God granting his Holy Spirit, God calling, God directing and so forth. By the way, chapter 1 is the entire vision that Ezekiel sees to help him grasp that He is before the Almighty God. Ezekiel’s response is to fall before God. He has no strength of his own nor any ability on his own. God grants it all.

 So God gives direction, God grants the Holy Spirit, God picks Ezekiel up and because of all of this Ezekiel can and does hear and completely understand what God is telling him. Ezekiel is to go to the people and tell them what God says. Again, remember what God told Ezekiel about the people? This would not be an easy or cushy job. Ezekiel would likely suffer because he carried God’s Word, but the Lord will be his strength and help in this job. So it is clear that God has made Ezekiel a prophet, one who will be a spokesman for God and lay forth exactly what God has to say, when, why and so forth. I can tell you right now that Ezekiel speaks exactly what God reveals and says.

 Think about that! Should we then excuse or twist and contort the Book of Ezekiel? It does not matter if it is hard to grasp, should we not, absolutely and positively, take the book of Ezekiel as God’s Word? I would answer, “Yes!” So, in that first chapter, though it is hard to grasp exactly what Ezekiel saw should I believe this a revelation of God or should I believe this a UFO encounter with aliens and such? You do realize that is what some want to do? But if you do that, then you immediately are dismissing the truth of God! God says this is about His revelation, about his way and Word and we are going to make it aliens? That is the very twisting and contorting of God’s Word that God warns about. Either God has clearly and absolutely revealed Himself and He is God or you do not really believe there is a God or a heaven or hell or anything else Godly. Believe or don’t that is really the only choice. And remember, our inclination is to not believe

 So Ezekiel is a prophet of God. He is being sent to a people who will by and large make his life difficult and miserable. Yet Ezekiel goes and does this! Is Ezekiel a nut or is he a prophet of God? And what is the most significant message God gets across to Ezekiel in this call? It is this: **“Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites…Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says.”** And now we will add a few more verses so you get the full impact of God’s Word. Verse 7, **“You must speak my words to them…open your mouth and eat what I give you…Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel…Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them…Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. Go now to your countrymen in exile and speak to them. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says.”** Now I could go on with this kind of admonition from God but I think you get the point. Ezekiel will speak God’s Word, exactly, truthfully, fully, bravely and carefully.

 Now, I think this has bearing on the entire Bible, the Word of God. Every prophet, every spokesman of God has been duly, carefully and truthfully recorded and passed down to us by the power of God. Every word and tittle that God wants us to know is recorded, assembled into the Bible and is, by the Lord, declared to be His Word and the very thing that will make the difference between eternal life and death. Here it is simply: Either you believe this or you don’t! Either you believe there is a God and He has revealed himself and His truth is fully before us or…well, you have joined the ranks of the people that Jesus soundly and completely condemned! Here is part of the importance of the book of Ezekiel. Not just the history found here, or the revelation of how God acted and moved in his grace and mercy, but that we grasp and fully understand that God has here and in the other books of the entire Bible given us His Word! It is a Word to be trusted and fully believed! It is the Word that lays forth life or death, eternal salvation or eternal damnation. You basically have before you the simple challenge of faith. Believe the Bible, all of it, to be God’s Word from which you may not subtract or add or twist and contort! Either you believe this God’s revelation and truth or you are pretty much godless!

 And here is the biggest reason that I say this. Please listen very carefully!

 I believe every prophet of God is literally a “shadow” of what was to come. In other words, their lives are such that we can learn about our Savior through them, their lives and words. Every prophet! So do you see Jesus “shadowed” in Ezekiel? Ask yourself, what was Jesus’ favorite name for himself? That’s right, “Son of man,” the very name God calls Ezekiel! I believe Jesus chose that name because of the prophet Ezekiel. That name, by my quick count is used some 93 times in this book! And if there is one thing that is emphasized about Ezekiel’s work, it is that it was the Word of God and only the Word of God that was the ministry of Ezekiel. Jesus liked that name because He is the Word of God.

 A few other quick things: Ezekiel had the Spirit upon him to begin his ministry, so did Jesus! Ezekiel was surrounded by those who made his ministry difficult and challenging, so did Jesus! Ezekiel was basically rejected by the people he was sent to serve, so was Jesus! I am sure that if I did a more in depth study of Ezekiel I could come up with more things that shadowed Jesus but let this list suffice for now.

 The most important thing I believe we need to grasp is exactly what our highlighted text says to us, because this fact is especially true when applied to Jesus. **“And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them.”** That very phrase is used a few times more in connection with the Word Ezekiel was given…whether they listen or fail to listen!! Dear people, that is the heart and core of what faith is about. Whether we listen or not to the Word of God. Not what you want to hear, not how you want to hear it, not how much you want to hear, but rather to hear it and believe is our call as God’s children.

 Just so you know, these solemn words are given in chapter 3:4-7. **“He then said to me; ‘Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them. You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel—not to many people of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you. But the house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate.”** Do not let this problem of Israel become your problem. Hear and believe God’s Word. It is not obscure and hard to understand. God gave it to us clearly and precisely. Believe the simple message of the Lord: **“whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, whoever does not believe will be condemned!”** Put you faith in Jesus, the True Word, the true Son of Man. He is our everything. He is our Savior, Redeemer and the hope of everything. He alone gives forgiveness and eternal life. He alone can rescue. Let Jesus the Word of the Sovereign Lord be your Word. Amen.