

# **Ezekiel's Timeless Message**

## **What Is the Real "Work of the Watchman"?**

Is there a special office of "watchman" in the New Testament church? Has God "anointed" someone as a special end-time "watchman" whose unique calling involves analyzing world news in the light of Bible prophecy? Does Jesus' admonition to watch (Matthew 24:42) correlate with Ezekiel's commission as "watchman" (Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:1-20)? Did Jesus mean that His disciples should be spending considerable time watching world events? And is a "watchman" someone who watches world events in order to warn people of impending calamities?

If we are to properly understand the book of Ezekiel, the prophet's commission, and precisely how his message applies to us, then we must first understand the prophecy from the perspective of the people to whom it was originally sent.

### **Ezekiel's Commission**

Ezekiel, who was both a priest and a prophet, was among the captives who were taken to Babylonia in 597 B.C. It was there that God commissioned him to begin prophesying concerning the immediate future and ultimate destiny of his people.

Ezekiel's message was primarily for the exiles in Babylonia, though it is possible that his warnings filtered to Palestine, where his contemporary, Jeremiah, was simultaneously proclaiming essentially the same message.

The prophet was to tell his fellow captives about the divine judgment that would soon befall Jerusalem and Judah. But his message was not restricted to the bad news of what happens to a people who are unfaithful to God's covenant; Ezekiel was to proclaim the glorious good news of God's promise to eventually regather the outcasts of Israel and Judah, establish His everlasting covenant with them, and restore them to national greatness (37:25-28).

God said to the prophet, "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me" (Ezekiel 3:17).

In ancient times it was common practice for nations to appoint guardians to watch the borders of their territories and warn the people of approaching danger. It was the watchman's duty to sound the trumpet and warn the people the moment he saw the enemy coming. If he saw the enemy coming, yet failed to sound the alarm, his failure was considered a criminal act, and every death brought by the enemy's sword was a murder charge for the watchman.

## **The Parable of the Watchman**

The responsibility of the watchman is described in the parable of Ezekiel 33:16. In the parable, the nation occupying the land is the object of divine retribution and the invading army is the instrument of punishment. The watchman's responsibility is to sound the alarm the moment he sees the enemy approaching or receives word of a threat from the enemy. If he fails to warn the people and someone is killed in the invasion, the watchman is held responsible.

The watchman of the parable is compared with the prophet Ezekiel and his God-given commission to serve as "a watchman for the house of Israel."

Just as the watchman of the parable was to issue a warning when he saw approaching enemy forces, Ezekiel was to warn the wicked among his people of the certainty of death if they failed to turn from their sinful ways.

"Therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul" (Ezekiel 33:7-9).

Ezekiel's message was given with a view toward God's promises to fully restore the people to their own land. The message is clear: The people could either die in their sins, or they could turn from their iniquities and live, and reap the covenantal blessings God had promised long before. Having already experienced the devastating results of breaking God's laws, each captive would have a new perspective as he pondered the choice set before him.

### **Individual Responsibility**

Read Ezekiel 33:7-9, and notice that the watchman's message is aimed at the individuals who make up the captive nation. It is a message of personal repentance. God says, "O house of Israel, I will judge every one of you according to his own ways" (verse 20).

Previously, the people had blamed their fathers for the problems they were facing. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes," they said, "And the children's teeth are set on edge" (18:2). But God rebuked them for this erroneous charge, declaring that each person lives or dies on the basis of his own behavior, not the behavior of someone else (18:3-18).

By the time Ezekiel was told to warn the people to turn from their evil ways, many had finally realized that their problems were their own fault and not the fault of their fathers. They said, "If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?" (33:10).

God's response to this admission of guilt and seeming hopeless condition is the heart of the watchman's message:

"Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why would you die, O house of Israel?'" (verse 11).

### **A Timeless Message**

While the watchman's warning was given to an ancient people suffering the consequences of their own wrong doing, and pertained primarily to the loss or preservation of their physical lives, its core message of repentance and remission of sins is timeless, and is essential to the commission Jesus Christ gave to His church.

The resurrected Christ said to His disciples, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46,47).

John the Baptist, in preparing the way before Jesus, "came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'" (Matthew 3:1).

The message of repentance was central to Jesus' own teaching. Like His forerunner, He admonished, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

On the first Pentecost after Christ's death and resurrection, the inspired apostle Peter admonished, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Later, addressing a different group, the apostle said, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..." (Acts 3:19).

These and many other scriptures prove conclusively that the message of repentance and remission of sins is and always has been a fundamental part of the work of God upon this earth and it's the heart and core of the real message of the watchman.

### **The Gospel According to Ezekiel**

Ezekiel's message is not all bad news. As stated previously, the prophet was to proclaim the good news of God's promise to regather the scattered people of Israel and Judah, reestablish His covenant with them, and restore the land of Israel to national greatness.

Listen to God's promise as stated in Ezekiel 11:17-19:

Therefore say, "Thus says the Lord God: 'I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of

Israel.' And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God."

After further expressing His disapproval of Israel's unfaithfulness, God again reiterates His promise to renew His covenant with her. In Ezekiel 16:60-63, God says,

Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed....And I will establish My covenant with you. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done....

Again and again, God pronounces severe judgments against Israel and Judah, but in the midst of these dire descriptions are assurances of Israel's return to the land and restoration to fellowship with God. Notice the physical and spiritual blessings promised in Ezekiel 36:24-30:

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations.

Remember, as Ezekiel proclaimed God's message to the captives in Babylonia, Jeremiah was proclaiming essentially the same message in Palestine. Both warned of the final destruction of Jerusalem and Judah; both spoke of a future time of restoration when God would reestablish His covenant with Israel and Judah; both spoke of a Davidic king who would rule from Jerusalem (Ezekiel 37:24-28; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 33:14-16).

The "everlasting covenant" Ezekiel spoke of is the "new covenant" The Same Covenant of Salvation God Gave To Abraham. Notice God says " I will remember My Covenant with you..." What Covenant?" There is only one everlasting Covenant, that God made with them in the days of their youth. The Abrahamic Covenant, see Gen 17:7. Where as the Old Covenant was to "Vanish" (Hebrew 8:13). When God says that he will make a "New Covenant" with Israel, when read in proper context, it does not mean a brand new Covenant, but another Covenant as opposed to the Old Covenant. That other Covenant, is the Abrahamic Covenant, that God made in the days of "their youth," as Ezekiel puts it.

Jeremiah and the writer of the book of Hebrews described (cf. Hebrews 8:6-13). **God's promise is to renew His covenant with the children of Israel is based upon the promise He made to Abraham centuries earlier.**

God promised Abraham that He would multiply his descendants and make them into a great nation, and that through his offspring all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:2,3). This, in a nutshell, is the gospel of the Kingdom of God!

The government of God upon this earth will begin with the restored nation of Israel and spread to all nations. Israel, as model nation, will be the means through which all the families of the earth will partake of the blessings promised to Abraham. Israel's king Jesus Christ will begin His righteous reign in the promised land, and will ultimately bring all nations under His rulership.

Ezekiel 37 describes the reconstitution of Israel and Judah as a single nation under one King. Chapters 38 and 39 describe God's fierce judgment against the enemies of the newly constituted nation. The remaining chapters of the book provide a detailed description of the restored city and temple of the future Messianic reign.

That's the good news of Ezekiel's message and it is an integral part of the message God's church today is commissioned to proclaim throughout the earth. It is essential to the real "work of the watchman," which is a collective work, not the job of one man.

### **Two Fold Meaning of "Watch"**

To "watch" is to be alert, or prepared. Jesus said, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42). This means that we should make sure we are prepared at all times because we do not know when Christ will return. The command to "watch" is another way of saying, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil...[and] that you may be able to withstand [or stand your ground] in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:11,13).

The true "work of the watchman" is a work of preaching repentance and the remission of sins to as many as possible, and of providing faith-enhancing instructions for those who turn to God.

The other meaning of "Watch" is to "Watch the events in the world, then lifting up your voice to the house of Israel, show them their sins, and then tell them what will happen unless they repent.

In Ezekiel God told him, "When I bring the sword upon the land, and the people of the land take a man of their territory and make him their watchman, *when he sees the sword upon the land*, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people...*So you, o son of man*, I have mad you a Watchman for the House of Israel...warn them from me" (Ezekiel 33:2-3, 7).

Ezekiel was set as a watchman was set up to watch world events, as they unfold in the light of Bible prophecy. So to "watch" means also to watch what is going on the world, and warn Israel about the things that are to happen. *But remember there are no set dates as to when these things will occur, see Matthew 24:36. We just have to be prepared at all times.*

### **Don't Put It Off!**

We do not know how much time we have left. The final tribulation period may be only a few years away, or it may be in the distant future. We simply do not know. *But our job of the watchman must continue, and warn Israel of what will happen unless they repent!* After all, we are mortal; we're dying! Any one of us could die at any moment. We simply have no guarantees. And that is precisely why you need to act now! We must be prepared at all times!

Don't put it off any longer! Turn to God in genuine repentance; resolve that you are going to begin obeying Him; accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, trusting Him to blot out your transgressions and give you the help you need in living a godly life; and then give us a call, and we'll do our best to put you in touch with someone who can counsel you for baptism.

Will you choose life by turning from your sins and trusting in God's provisions for redemption, or will you choose the way that leads to death? That's the question Ezekiel set before the people, and it's the question that has been set before you today.

The choice is yours. Which will it be?

Choose life!