

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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I Have Made You A Watchman Ezekiel 3:17

The responsibility of a watchman was crucial. It could mean life or death for those over whom he was watching. God calls Ezekiel to be a watchman. He was appointed as God's spokesman to speak the word of the Lord to the nation in exile.

Ezekiel was both a prophet and a priest. He ministered during a very dark period in Judah's history. The nation was in captivity as a result of its rebellion against the Lord. Ezekiel had been taken captive prior to final demise of Jerusalem. The Lord calls him to be His prophet. God used Ezekiel sometimes as a human prop to dramatize the message that God wanted to communicate to His people.

Ezekiel's prophetic ministry manifests a deep priestly overtone to it. He speaks of the temple, of sacrifices, the priesthood, and most importantly, the Shekinah Glory of God. The first person singular is used throughout the entire book of Ezekiel. This signifies the work of one author, namely, Ezekiel. There are a number of phrases that occur regularly throughout the prophecy. These are, "you will know that I am the Lord," "son of man," "the word of the Lord came to me," and "the glory of the Lord."

Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 3 stages. In 605 BC he overcame Jehoiakim and carried him away to Babylon in captivity. At the same time, Daniel and his three friends also went into captivity. In 597 BC, Jehoiachin rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar bringing further retribution. Nebuchadnezzar carried off 10,000 captives including the king and Ezekiel. Finally, in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar after a long siege against Jerusalem destroyed the city, the houses and the temple, and removed the rest of the people into captivity. Zedekiah the king was blinded and taken into exile also.

Ezekiel provides the date of his call to the prophetic office in chapter 1. He says that in the thirtieth year (vs. 1), which is further clarified as being in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile. In 594/3 BC, Ezekiel probably being thirty years of age was called by God to be God's prophet. In the Levitical system, a man would assume his full responsibilities for the priesthood at the age of thirty (Num. 4:3). Ezekiel, therefore was 25 when he went into captivity.

By the time that Ezekiel arrived in Babylon, Daniel and his three friends were well known. In Jerusalem, Jeremiah was laboring with no reward for his prophetic ministry. Ezekiel mentions Daniel three times (14:14, 20; 28:3). Ezekiel made his home at Tel-abib, which was the principal colony of Jewish exiles along the Grand Canal of Nebuchadnezzar called the Chebar River. From 592 to 586, Ezekiel found it necessary to convince the unbelieving Jews in Babylon that there was no hope of an immediate deliverance. This was only came home to them once they heard that Jerusalem had been destroyed in 586 BC.

The role of a prophet in the plan and purpose of God provides interesting insight into both God and the prophet. A marriage ceremony or an ordination service carries immense responsibility. The sense of the sacred is associated with them. This is the same with the call of a prophet. Associated with responsibilities and duties are all the inter-connected relationships that go with these appointments (whether marriage, ordination or the prophetic ministry).

It was the sense of God's calling that dramatically affected the prophet and his work. One over-riding factor weighs upon the prophet – he did not choose this office for himself. It was thrust upon him by God. He could not escape it nor the responsibilities associated with it. Jonah attempted to get away from God and his obligations – it was not possible.

It was this consciousness of being called and commissioned directly by God that set apart the true prophet. This was the case explicitly with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos (Isa. 6; Jer. 1:4 – 10; Ezek. 1:4 – 3:11; Amos 7:10 – 17). It is interesting that these passages record in first person the call of the prophet. The prophet's call always came in the context of a historical situation. Usually some crisis was at hand. The prophets were men of history – their lives woven into the very fabric of the society of which they were a part. Ezekiel's summons is unique in that he was away from his homeland. He was given the responsibility of sounding the alarm first to the nation. He was their watchman. He was to warn the wicked of the consequences of their sin. His own life would be forfeited should he fail to fulfill his commission. Thus the burden of the prophetic office was serious and weighed heavy on the prophets of God. When we read the lives of these prophets we take for granted and overlook this burden that was so intricately woven into their beings.

It is clear in the cases of Isaiah and Ezekiel that they recorded their glorious vision of God. This vision of the Lord God was real and profound. They each saw that manifestation of the glory of God and it devastated them. Sometimes the prophets experienced sickness after such a vision (see Isa. 21:3, 4; Dan. 8:27; 10:8; Hab. 3:16; Ezek. 3:15).

Ezekiel had such an elaborate vision of God at the time of his call. His whole book concerns the departing and the returning of the glory of God. In successive stages the glory of God rises from its dwelling place in Jerusalem and departs from the temple mount (Ezek. 9:3; 10:13, 18, 19; 11:22, 23). The reconstruction of the greater temple with its greater glory concludes the book (Ezek. 42:15 – 20; 43:2, 5).

Ezekiel sees four living creatures positioned beneath the Throne of God. Wheels are interconnected with wheels covered with embedded eyes. There is a readiness of movement instantly available to God at any time and in any direction. The vision reflects or demonstrates the idea of mobility in a wheeled chariot throne. Wheels inside wheels whirring simultaneously allow forward and lateral movement.

Brilliant lightning flashes and the sound of expansive rushing waters fill the ears of the prophet (see also Rev. 1:10 – 18). Above the expanse there is seated a man whose person glows with gloriously hot metal. He is seated on a sapphire throne surrounded by dark threatening clouds and a spectacular rainbow. Out of this magnificent manifestation, the voice of God summons the prophet to deliver God's word to His people.

Who would not fear for their very lives at such a sight? This is why it is the sight of the glory of God that is communicated to Ezekiel that will sustain him in the dark days that lie ahead. When Ezekiel's wife is taken from him by command of the Lord - it is this vision that will keep the prophet going.

With a deep sense of inadequacy which every prophet confesses, and with a deep sense of shame and sin, the prophet submits to God. Is it any wonder that John the Baptist can step onto the pages of history so suddenly and so devastatingly. Where did he come from? It was not just from the deserts that he came, but rather straight from the presence of God. This is what made the prophets watchmen. The vision of God drove them onwards. This is what we need in our time - men and women coming from the presence of God with a burning message. The reaction of the people to the prophet is completely secondary to God. The prophet must simply obey God and deliver God's word. The watchman must cry aloud when danger threatens. If he fails – he must forfeit his own life. What a responsibility!